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Constructing Discourses:

A Postmodern Interpretation of a Rural Public Library System

PhD

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Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H1120).

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ABSTRACT

Aim

Most of the literature related to the study of library and information science tends to spring from a modern, positivist paradigm. Only a small number of theorists, working in what some describe as “the periphery” of library and information science (Trosow 2001), explore the ways that postmodern thought can be applied to the study of libraries. This thesis looks at issues related to a particular public library through both modern and postmodern perspectives. The insights evoked raise questions about many of the basic tenets of public librarianship.

Scope

The subject of this study is the Vancouver Island Regional Library, a large integrated public library system on the west coast of Canada. The researcher is also the Executive Director. The underlying conceptual framework includes the idea that modern and postmodern thought are reflective of different epistemologies and play out differently within the contemporary social condition.

The research is grounded in a qualitative, constructivist research tradition. Mailed questionnaires, individual interviews, and group interviews, using open-ended questions, are used to elicit opinions from board members, qualified librarians, local branch heads, and customers.

Comments that seem to indicate a modern or postmodern perspective about such things as truth, knowledge, belief, the knowing subject, language, binary pairs, the role of the author, the organization of knowledge, the increase in information, professionals, power, the panoptic principle, moral panics, significant groups, feminism, culture, premodern phenomena, work, and bureaucracy, as they relate to the Vancouver Island

Regional Library, are interpreted hermeneutically. This interpretation, it is argued, evokes new and interesting insights into the Regional Library that would not be found through scientific analysis.

A second cycle of hermeneutic interpretation evokes scepticism about many of the modern, positivist tenets of public librarianship that one participant suggests are “inculcated” into librarians. Questions are raised about such long-standing beliefs as the need for the librarian’s neutral stance; the necessity of the balanced collection; the public library’s role in supporting intellectual freedom; the intrinsic difference between fiction and non-fiction; the scientific nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification system; the superiority of professional librarians; the possibility of complete, correct reference transactions; the need to charge penalties to ensure materials are returned on time; the belief that the female nature of the workforce is not significant; the effectiveness of library bureaucracy; the need for increased tax support for public libraries; and traditional ways of planning for the future of public libraries. A number of pragmatic strategies are suggested.

Conclusion

The principal conclusion of the research is that postmodern thought can offer new insights into the Vancouver Island Regional Library. By implication it can help librarians and library and information science theorists understand other public libraries differently and, in so doing, assist public libraries adapt to the postmodern social condition.

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Before the Prologue

I am trying to write the first sentence in this Prologue. I can't get it right.

I want the first sentence to set the context for describing why I think library theorists and practitioners should consider postmodern social theory. I want to write it in such a way that readers will easily understand the insights I have gathered through reading and research.

But this approach seems too modernist. In postmodernism, after all, it is readers who decide how they will interpret texts. The author is dethroned. An author who tries to provide all the answers is “committing the modern error of engaging in a kind of terrorism designed to constrain or control your thoughts and actions” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 225).

I try again. Should I just write: “Dear reader, here are a few ideas. Make of them what you will.” What will a reader with limited understanding of postmodern theory make of that?

I decide to tell a story—the story of my journey to an understanding of how postmodern social theory is useful for public librarianship. Here it is.

PROLOGUE

1. Introduction

The question that this thesis addresses is: “Can a postmodern interpretation offer new insights into a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?”

Fundamental to this thesis is an awareness of postmodern thought. From my experience, most library practitioners have little interest in the subject. Six years ago, I was in the same position. However, through a combination of unexpected events, I have over the past six years come to a modest understanding of postmodernism.

The process has at times been difficult and perplexing. I believe this is because the process is not about learning about new ideas. It is about learning how to think differently. At least, looking back, that is how I experienced the process. In this Prologue, I will tell the story of how I became captivated by postmodern ideas and how I came to write this thesis.

2. The Masters Program and Positivism

My journey began, in the summer of 1997, when I enrolled in the Masters of Education program being offered jointly by James Cook University of Townsville, Australia and Malaspina University College of Nanaimo, British Columbia. I was a professional librarian with a Bachelor’s Degree in Library Science. I wanted to obtain a Masters Degree to improve my career opportunities. I was attracted to the James Cook/Malaspina program because it was a distance education program aimed at mid-career professionals whose work involved dealing with rural issues. I was also interested in learning more about research methodology.

The first course in the Masters Program was the study of rural issues. The instructor challenged the class to come up with a definition of the word *rural*. We agreed that a definition based on the size of a community or its distance from the nearest large community was not satisfactory because different countries use different numerical criteria. We also agreed that rural was not necessarily associated with agriculture because small remote logging, fishing and mining communities were clearly rural but had no farms. Nonetheless, some of us were sure that there must be a brief definition that would capture the essence of rural but none was obvious. Some of the readings for the course stated that many people have struggled unsuccessfully to define rural. Our instructor suggested that ruralness, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder.

Our instructor also pointed out that our desire to find one universally correct definition for the word rural was rooted in our positivist perspective. It seemed that, like most people in the Western World, we were positivists even though we didn't know what the word meant. He pointed out that positivism is a way of thinking that it is based on the following assumptions: There is a reality. People are distinct from this reality and can know about it. Reality is governed by immutable laws and mechanisms. People can discover the truth about these laws and mechanisms by rigorously following replicable scientific methods of inquiry. Quantifying an issue or situation gives a better understanding of it than simply describing it. Language allows us to accurately express the truths we have discovered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).

Because we believed that we could know and quantify reality and that we could use language to accurately express truth, we believed that we could discover that one precise definition for rural.

However, we were told, there are other ways of thinking. For example, in *postpositivism*, reality exists but we can only apprehend it imperfectly. In

constructivism, realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions which are local and specific in nature and which can be altered as we become more informed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). Many definitions were possible for the word rural and we were free to choose whatever meaning suited our purposes. I found this perplexing. I had always believed that defining terms was the first step in studying an issue. How could we study a phenomenon for which there was no correct definition? I wrote the required essays using my own definition and passed the course.

The research methods course was even more disconcerting. My work at the Vancouver Island Regional Library had included doing a number of market research projects to find out about such things as how satisfied people were with the service the library provided. In preparing to do this market research, I had learned how to create what I believed were neutral, non-leading questions. I had a basic knowledge of a statistical software package and was able to run and interpret frequencies and cross tabulations and discover statistically significant findings. I had expected that the Masters Program would give me the opportunity to enhance that knowledge by learning how to ensure my questions were truly unbiased and by giving me a better understanding of how to interpret statistical reports correctly. However, this was not the case. Although the instructors touched briefly on what they called *quantitative* research, the course was mainly focused on *qualitative* research methods.

The instructors encouraged us to examine the philosophical foundations behind research. We talked about truth and the different ways we think we arrive at truth. We learned that positivists believe that truth is discovered empirically through rigorous scientific research. Scientists have made countless important discoveries in the hard sciences using the positivist perspective. However positivism is not as effective in the social sciences. People do not follow immutable laws and mechanisms. In contrast,

postmodernists believe that truth, especially truth about human behaviour, is constructed in our discourse with each other. Postmodern truth is context specific and non-generalizable. I concluded that, like the word rural the meaning of the word *truth* was in the eye of the beholder.

The final part of the research methods course was writing our research proposal. I proposed doing a phenomenological study about the meaning that a library has for people living in a particular Vancouver Island rural community. I chose phenomenological research as my methodology because I had learned that phenomenology was the way to study meaning. My proposal was accepted. I then set about reading appropriate books and articles on the phenomenological research tradition (Carson, 1986; Creswell, 1998, Embree, 1997, Moustakas, 1994; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990; Van Manen, 1996; Van Manen, 1997; Weber, 1986). None of what I read made much sense to me.

Fortunately, my next step was to review the literature related to my question. Research would come later. I spent a year reading everything I could find about what people think are the roles and purposes of public libraries. Towards the end of reviewing this literature, I came across a small number of writers (Black & Muddiman, 1997; G. P. Radford, 1998) who suggested that an understanding of postmodern thought could provide useful insights into understanding libraries.

3. The Doctoral Program and Postmodernism

I decided to change my research question to something to do with an exploration of the ways in which postmodern thought can help us to understand public libraries. Since the topic of my research now required more study than would have been required by a Masters Degree, I was permitted to upgrade to a Doctor of Philosophy without completing the Masters Program. I no longer proposed to use the phenomenological

research tradition, which still eluded me, choosing instead constructivist, hermeneutical methods which I had begun to understand. With phenomenology behind me, I set about reading about postmodernism. The first book I read was by George Ritzer (1997). Ritzer commented,

Postmodern social theory is a highly complex, jargonistic, contradictory body of work that would put off all but the most persistent social thinkers. This book is designed for those who really would like to know what the noise surrounding postmodernism is all about but lack the training and/or time to pore over the innumerable original texts. (p. 5)

I read on:

Judith Butler (1995:51) speaks not only for many postmodernists but also most modernists when she announces: “I don’t know what postmodernism is.” While no concept has greater resonance today among scholars than “postmodernism,” there is an enormous ambiguity and controversy over exactly what is meant by that notion and related terms. (p. 5)

This time I was not surprised that the definition was unclear. I had become used to the idea that people see things differently. I had thought enough about positivism over the intervening years that I had ceased to be an “unwitting positivist.” My view of reality was almost always grounded in the positivist assumptions mentioned above, but I was conscious of this and it was no longer difficult to step away from those assumptions and accept that there were other ways of thinking. I was in the right frame of mind to learn about postmodernism and, despite his warnings, I found Ritzer’s *Postmodern Social Theory* (1997) to be one of the most fascinating books I had ever read.

I continued to read and think about postmodernism (Dickens & Fontana, 1994; McRobbie, 1994; Rosenau, 1992; Seidman, 1994a; Seidman, 1994b; Seidman, 1998; Smart, 1992; Smart, 1993). My Malaspina and James Cook advisors encouraged and supported me in this pursuit. I gradually came to believe that postmodernism is a reaction to the positivist thinking of the modern age.

Some of the postmodern theorists I read suggested that the modern age began during the Renaissance when Francis Bacon (1561-1626) introduced the idea that humans could exercise power over nature by discovering nature's secrets. Others suggested it began in the Age of Enlightenment when Descartes (1596-1650), Locke (1632-1704), Hume (1711-1776), and Kant (1724-1804) explored the nature of reason, experience and subjectivity, and when the premodern idea that truth was revealed by God gave way to the positivist view that truth could be discovered empirically (Hall, Held & McGrew, 1994; Sedgwick, 2001, Seidman, 1998). Regardless of when the modern age began, during the 20th century, various thinkers began to seriously question the modern mind-set. Writers such as Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Anthony Giddens, Jurgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, Daniel Bell and Fredric Jameson raised people's awareness that modernism has a dark side. They wrote about such things as relationships of power, the consumer society, the death of grand theories, modernity as a juggernaut, modernity as an unfinished project, living with ambivalence, the change in the character of knowledge, and the depthlessness of postmodern society. There had been other criticisms of modernism in the past, but this outpouring of concern with the underlying beliefs of modernism was seen to be a new movement known as postmodernism.

I went back to library literature to see if I could locate work by library theorists related to postmodernism. Among the numerous things written about libraries over the past two decades, I found a handful of articles and books that addressed the issue of how postmodern ideas could be applied to libraries (Budd, 1995; Budd, 2001a; Budd, 2001b, Budd & Raber, 1998; Cornelius, 1996; Dick, 1995; Dick, 1999; Muddiman, 1999; G. P. Radford, 1998; G. P. Radford & Budd, 1997; Richardson, 1992; Trosow, 2001; Wisner, 2000). I was excited to find that some of these writers' ideas were

consistent with the ideas I was exploring. I was disappointed that, in relation to the work of non-library postmodern theorists, other ideas seemed confused and confusing. I noted that all the writers focused on academic libraries or the teaching of librarianship and information studies. None had much to say about public libraries.

I realized that I had arrived in a unique position. During the years I was working in the Masters Program I had been appointed the Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library. As a fulltime public library administrator, I knew about the myriad details that small and large public libraries deal with every day. As a fulltime PhD student, in a non-library related PhD program, I had been exposed to ideas that most librarians have not had the opportunity to learn about. Although I realized that my understanding of postmodernism was fairly basic, I felt I knew as much as the library theorists who were writing about it in the literature. I proceeded to do my research with stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library and thus this thesis emerged.

After the Prologue

Dear reader, here are a few ideas. Make of them what you will.

Before Chapter One.

I wrote the first draft of chapter one. It was tightly organized. It followed the thesis structure we were taught in the Masters Program. It spoke with authority and confidence. It was clear and concise and to the point.

My advisors agreed that it is all those things. BUT—they also said it was “archetypally modern” and thus inconsistent with my new found position as a moderate postmodernist. There was no room in my archetypally modern chapter for readers to make their own interpretations.

I tried a second draft. This one was loosely organized and discontinuous. It evoked a sense of ambiguity and inconclusiveness. It was almost as if the sentences had little spaces in them for other ideas to wriggle free. Postmodern readers would probably get it, but I think it would just annoy modern readers.

I tried a third draft – somewhere between the other two. I think it is organized enough for modern readers but contingent enough for postmodern readers. It guides the reader through the story but allows readers to disagree with me.

I hope my ideas survive this ordeal by language.

CHAPTER 1. QUESTION, KEY TERMS AND RATIONALE

1.1. Introduction

According to library historians, tax supported public libraries have been a feature of the English speaking world since the middle of the nineteenth century (Awcock, 1996, Berriman, 1998, p. 3; Black & Muddiman, 1997, p. 17; Murison, 1971, pp. 22-23; Nunberg, 1998). During the 150 years since they came into existence, they appear to have adapted, more or less successfully, to changes in the society of which they were a part (Campbell, 1983, p. 23). The work of adapting public libraries to societal change and planning for the future goes on today. However, most librarians and theorists of library and information science seem to ignore a commonly held and useful way of understanding our current social situation. Very few give consideration to what many social scientists now call the postmodern social condition. Seidman (1994a) describes the postmodern condition as follows:

At the heart of the modern west is the culture of the Enlightenment. Assumptions regarding the unity of humanity, the individual as the creative force of society and history, the superiority of the west, the idea of science as Truth, and belief in social progress, have been fundamental to Europe and the United States. This culture is now in a state of crisis. Signs of cultural turmoil are everywhere: in the resurgence of religious fundamentalism, in the declining authority of key social institutions, in the enfeeblement of western political ideologies and parties, and in the cultural wars over literary and aesthetic canons and paradigms of knowledge. A broad social and cultural shift is taking place in western societies. The concept of the “postmodern” captures at least certain aspects of this social change. (p. 1)

I have found from personal experience that, rather than developing new ways of adapting to this complex postmodern condition, public librarians continue to use strategies which I now consider better suited to a strictly modern age. For example, statistically significant surveys are conducted to prove that public libraries contribute to the economy and are thus worthy of public support (Fitch & Warner, 1997; Vaughan, 1997). Statistics are collected and published to show that public libraries are well

utilized and thus important to the electorate (Public Library Services Branch, 2002). I recently heard a respected library advocate suggest that, in order to gain more financial support, we must convince decision makers that public libraries are “the people’s university.”

These attempts to help public libraries adapt to the current situation appear to be rooted in the modern, positivist view of reality. I suggest that, because they ignore the complex, contradictory postmodern world that Seidman describes, they will probably not have the desired effect. For example, statistically significant proof¹ that public libraries contribute to the economy will probably be irrelevant to postmodernists who do not accept science as truth and, like Baudrillard², find scientific surveys meaningless. Likewise, publicizing the electorate’s extensive use of public libraries will probably not be persuasive to postmodernists if they have lost confidence in western political ideologies and parties and view statistics about the electorate as worthless. Eloquent arguments that public libraries are the people’s university will probably not be convincing to postmodernists who question modern universities’ canons and paradigms of knowledge. In other words, librarians who are not aware of postmodern points of view may misdirect their energies. In the process, they may miss many opportunities to help public libraries adapt to and flourish in contemporary society.

¹ “Quantitative research claims to be able to use statistical samples to infer reasonably accurate information about the general population. The more random and the larger the sample is, the higher the confidence level” (Alreck & Settle, 1985).

² According to Smart (1993), Baudrillard (1983, p. 20) suggests that “The existence of the mass or silent majority is ‘no longer social, but statistical.... [its] only mode of appearance is that of the survey’” (p. 54-55).

I suggest that, if libraries are to adapt to social conditions at the beginning of the 21st century and prepare effectively for the future, librarians and library theorists, need to pay attention to the postmodern condition in which libraries exist, as well as to the postmodern ideas that interpret and celebrate this condition. This thesis is my attempt to show that it is possible for librarians and library theorists to use ideas from postmodern thought to understand contemporary public libraries better.

Although it seems to be traditional for a PhD thesis to delve deeply into one or two aspects of an area as complex as how postmodern thought can apply to libraries, I have chosen to make this study wide-ranging. This is because I think postmodern thought may be able to illuminate many aspects of public libraries and I want to bring this broad applicability to the attention of librarians and library theorists. To put it another way, because there seems to have been so little research and postmodern thinking done about public libraries, this thesis is my attempt at an initial overview. I realize that by taking this approach I risk making my work appear superficial. If readers can suspend their concerns about the sketchiness of the individual parts and accept them as pieces of a mosaic or pastiche, I think the full value of applying postmodern thought to public libraries will become apparent. I think it would be interesting and worthwhile to explore each idea and issue more deeply, but that is outside the scope of this study. An in-depth exploration of the ideas and issues touched on by this thesis remains for another time and, possibly, because the opportunities are many, for other researchers.

In this chapter, I will describe the research question and the meanings of the key terms in the question; I will explain why I think this question is worth studying; and I will provide an outline of the thesis.

1.2. The Research Question

I recognize that it is customary, in writing a contemporary PhD thesis, to use the convention of the research question. This convention helps writers determine the boundaries of their thesis and prepares readers for what to expect. The question I am studying is, “Can a postmodern interpretation offer new insights into a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?”

This research question is based on two things. First, my observation, supported by the literature about public libraries, that people perceive public libraries in many different ways. Second, my understanding that, at the beginning of the 21st century, Western society is undergoing a complex set of philosophical, societal, cultural, and economic changes that are often described by the term postmodern. Libraries exist within this changing society yet, in contemporary library and information science literature, there seems to be little acknowledgement that postmodernism may be affecting the ways we understand public libraries.

My question frames my research by indicating how I am interpreting the data (using postmodern thought); why I am doing the research (to provide new insights), and what the research is about (a rural integrated regional library). As will become evident, I think the answer to my question is a fairly confident yes.

1.3. Key Terms

Although postmodern thought seems to find the use of definitions limiting and confining³, I think readers may find it helpful if I describe what I mean by some of the

³ According to Rosenau (1992), moderate postmodernists “argue that there can be a certain consensus about words or concepts, as is the case for professional social scientists. Meaning is still erratic in the sense that it is always acquired, shaped, or invented by professional or social interaction” (p. 80).

key terms that appear in the research question. I am not attempting to provide correct definitions for each of the terms. I am simply giving some background on how I use the key terms to clarify the meaning of the research question and set the context for the study. The terms I will focus on are:

1. Postmodernism
2. Rural
3. Integrated regional library.

1.3.1. Postmodernism

As anyone familiar with the subject will confirm, clarifying the meaning of *postmodernism* is not straightforward. One reason is that the term refers to radically new ways of thinking and talking about phenomena. As Rosenau (1992) suggests, postmodernism can be understood as a “re-conceptualization of how we experience and explain the world around us” (p. 4). Another closely related reason why clarification is not straightforward is that it is difficult to express this new way of thinking in language that an uninitiated person can understand. Many writers, including Smart (1993, p. 13), Ritzer (1997, p. xviii) and Rosenau (1992, p. 20) deal with this difficulty by acknowledging that they are maintaining an essentially modernist perspective. They talk about postmodernism in the modern way that most people understand.

In this thesis, I attempt to use language in such a way that it is consistent with the moderate postmodern position I have adopted. I base my understanding of moderate postmodernism on Rosenau’s (1992) distinction between radical postmodernism and moderate postmodernism. She states,

In its most extreme formulations, post-modernism⁴ is revolutionary; it goes to the very core of what constitutes social science and radically dismisses it. In its more moderate proclamation, post-modernism encourages substantive re-definition and innovation. Post-modernism proposes to set itself up outside the modern paradigm, not to judge modernity by its own criteria but rather to contemplate and deconstruct it. (p. 4)

By using language that is more contingent than modernists probably expect, I hope to sustain my moderate approach.

A third reason it is difficult to clarify the meaning of postmodernism is that different writers define the term differently. In my review of the literature that comments on and interprets postmodernism, I found at least six different meanings for the term.

1.3.1.1. Postmodernism as 20th century movements in various artistic disciplines

Some scholars consider postmodernism as being related to such 20th century artistic movements as art, architecture, dance, etc. For example, according to Bertens (1995), postmodernism “refers, first of all, to a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s.” The use of the term was not consistently applied. Therefore “because it was used for diametrically opposed practices in different artistic disciplines, the term was deeply problematical almost right from the start” (p. 3).

1.3.1.2. Postmodernism as criticism of modernism

Many scholars view postmodernism as a criticism of the excesses of modernism. For example, Smart (1993) cites Bauman (1991) as describing postmodernity as “no more (but no less either) than the modern mind taking a long, attentive and sober look at itself, at its condition and its past works, not fully liking what it sees and sensing the

⁴ Rosenau uses the spelling “post-modern” whereas most authors I quote use the spelling “postmodern.”

urge to change.... Postmodernity is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility” (p. 100). Smart (1992) also suggests that Habermas (1981) identifies postmodernism “as one of the major forms in which conservative responses to the apparent shortcomings of the project of modernity have been articulated” (p. 162). Smart himself sees postmodernity as “a way of living with the doubts, uncertainties and anxieties which seem increasingly to be a corollary of modernity, the inescapable price to be paid for the gains, benefits and the pleasures associated with modernity” (p. 12). He also comments that Foucault (1986) proposes

to conceive of modernity as an attitude rather than a historical era “Rather than seeking to distinguish the ‘modern era’ from the ‘premodern’ or ‘postmodern’... it would be more useful to try to find out how the attitude of modernity, ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of ‘countermodernity.’” (p. 161)

1.3.1.3. Postmodernism as a philosophical perspective

Some scholars see postmodernism as a philosophical perspective. For example, Bertens (1995) comments that in the 1980s

postmodernism began to engage the serious attention of professional philosophers and of leftist critics.... The contributions of Habermas and Jameson mark the long overdue participation of the traditional left in the debate, Baudrillard emerges as the champion of the radical left, and Lyotard and Rorty, in spite of important differences, paradoxically come to represent... respectable postmodernism to which even liberal humanists... cannot very well take exception. (p. 111)

However postmodern philosophy is complex and contradictory. As Sackney, Walker and Mitchell (1999) comment, “postmodernism does not seek to make fixed, precise, or foundational metaphysical, epistemological, or axiological statements or claims” (p. 36). Rosenau (1992) comments that postmodernists “seek a philosophical and ontological intellectual practice that is nondogmatic, tentative, and nonideological” (p.16).

I think it is useful, at this point, to note the differences, described in the literature, between three related philosophical stances: postmodernism, poststructuralism and structuralism. According to Seidman (1998),

structuralism was a “constructive” project intent on identifying linguistic and social order, poststructuralism had a “deconstructive” aim: to demonstrate that all claims to ground an order to society, knowledge, or morality in something beyond traditions or communities were unwarranted and concealed a will to power. (pp. 221-22)

According to Ritzer (1997), structuralism and poststructuralism emerged at approximately the same time in the 1960s (p. 26). Ritzer also says,

In general poststructuralism is treated as an intellectual precursor of postmodernism... it is one of the strands of thought that fed into the development of postmodern social theory.... One general distinction (with many exceptions) is that poststructuralism tends to be more abstract, more philosophical, and less political, than postmodernism. (p. 32)

Bertens (1995) suggests that poststructuralists who were absorbed into postmodernity include Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (pp. 6-7). I have chosen in this thesis not to refer to the philosophy of poststructuralism using, instead, the broader term postmodernism.

1.3.1.4. Postmodernism as a new kind of social theory

A number of scholars see postmodernism as a new kind of social theory. For example, as mentioned previously, Seidman (1994a) suggests, “The concept of the ‘postmodern’ captures at least certain aspects of this social change” (p.1). Ritzer (1997) also sees postmodernism as social theory. He comments, “A good deal of the most interesting and important contemporary social theory swirls in and around the postmodern scene” (p.1).

1.3.1.5. Postmodernism as an historical era

Many writers see postmodernism (or postmodernity), not just as a new way of understanding the world around us, but also as an historical era in which postmodern views prevail. Hall (1992) suggests that people are beginning to believe that

“modernism is being displaced by a post-modern epoch” (p. 8). Kvale (1992) states, “Postmodernity refers to an age which has lost the Enlightenment belief in emancipation and progress through more knowledge and scientific research” (p. 2).

Like everything else about postmodernism, there is little agreement about the timing of the postmodern era. According to Smart (1993), some people believe that the postmodern era is behind us (p. 12). A more common opinion is that it began sometime in the 20th century and continues through to today. Smart (1992) credits Toynbee (1954) with being the first person to conceive of the idea that the postmodern era has displaced the modern. Toynbee said this occurred with World War I (p. 164). On the other hand, Smart (1993) indicates that Huysen (1984) believes that postmodernism appropriately described “significant cultural transformations [which] have been taking place in Western societies during the period since the end of the second world war” (p. 16). Ritzer (1997) takes the 1960’s, when “structuralism... swept through French social thought,” as the “proximate starting point for the emergence of poststructuralism and postmodernism” (p. 26).

1.3.1.6. Postmodern as a utopian era sometime in the future.

While many scholars say that we are now living in a postmodern era, others suggest that a postmodern era lies in the future. If it occurs, this future postmodern era will be a time when the excesses of modernism will be behind us. For example, according to Ritzer (1997), “Giddens believes it is possible now to gain a glimpse of postmodernity. Such a world, in his view, would be characterized by a post-scarcity system, increasingly multilayered democratization, demilitarization and the humanization of technology” (p. 147). According to Smart (1992), Toffler (1983) believes that great dangers lie ahead yet “the odds lie with ultimate survival and the construction of a more democratic, economically and ecologically more ‘coherent and workable’ civilisation” (p. 76). On a

similar note, Held (1992) suggests that Illich (1978) also thinks of a future beyond modernism. To achieve this future “will necessitate sacrifices and the development of a life-style of ‘modern subsistence’” (p. 35).

1.3.1.7. Postmodernism as a Useless Concept

A number of other scholars question the value of the concept of postmodernism. For example Beck (1992), cited in Ritzer (1997) believes that “we are witnessing not the end but the beginning of modernity—that is, of a modernity beyond its classical industrial design” (p. 150). Smart (1992) says Hall (1986) “questions whether there is ‘any such absolutely novel and unified thing as the postmodern condition’ ... and reminds us that the old certainties have been in question for some time now, at least from the turn of the century” (p. 131).

1.3.1.8. My Understanding of Postmodernism

My understanding of postmodernism is that it is both a philosophical approach and a social condition. As a philosophical approach, I see postmodernism as a reaction against modernism. I think that, to understand the philosophical meaning of postmodernism, it is also necessary to understand the philosophical meaning of modernism, which postmodernism is seen to criticize. I consider the two terms to be inextricably linked.

Postmodern thought regarding the nature of language provides two useful insights. The first is summed up by Gergen’s (1992) comment that “when we enter the process of description we invariably rely on conventions of language. We must make use of these conventions or we fail to communicate at all. Yet, these conventions simultaneously govern what can be communicated.... One may never exit the language... to give a true and accurate portrayal of what is the case” (p. 22). The second insight is Saussure’s (1966) concept of binary word pairs. According to Ritzer (1997), Saussure claimed that “the meaning of the word does not come from some intrinsic property of the ‘real world’

but from the word's relationship with, its binary opposition to, the word cold" (p. 29). In other words, the meanings of hot and cold are governed by a language convention whereby they are linked together and dependent on each other. Something that is hot is understood not to be cold. Something that is cold is understood not to be hot.

The concept of binary word pairs can be applied to the terms, postmodernism and modernism. The definition of the one word clarifies the meaning of the other and vice versa. In other words, I think that as scholars developed the complex array of what are called postmodern concepts, they also developed a contrasting array of what are called modern concepts. While I would not go so far as to say that the modern concepts are simply "straw men" set up for postmodernism to comment on, I would say that they are often stereotypical descriptions of extreme positivist thought. Seidman (1994a) states it this way:

The concept of "modernity" has today a quite different content from the one it had before the start of the "postmodern" discourse; there is little point in asking whether it is true or distorted, or in objecting to the way it is handled inside the "postmodern" debate. It is situated in that debate, it draws its meaning from it, and it makes sense only jointly with the other side of the opposition, the concept of "postmodernity", as that negation without which the latter concept of "modernity", made of the presence of all those things for the lack of which the concept of "postmodernity" stands. (p. 188)

As a social condition, I see postmodernism as a set of social, cultural and economic conditions that can be understood as such only because postmodern philosophers have constructed an understanding of them in that way.

This study explores twenty themes, found in the literature of postmodern social theorists, in which modern and postmodern perceptions differ significantly from each other. I call these binary concepts "modern/postmodern themes" and will describe them in detail in chapter four.

1.3.2. Rural

As I mentioned in the prologue, there are many different meanings for the word rural. For example, Humphreys and Rolley (1991) suggest that “despite the vast literature on rural areas and the countryside, to date no clear and unambiguous statement exists of parameters by which ‘rural’ is defined” (p. 19). Merwin (1995) notes that “a difficulty encountered in all rural research is the lack of consistent definitions for rural” (p. 526). Sher (1994) suggests that “the true meaning of rural varies considerably from nation to nation—and, sometimes, even within parts of the same nation” (p. 11). Martinez-Brawley (2000) comments that, because the word rural raises unnecessary debate, she prefers to use the term “small community” (p. 2).

Despite these comments, there exist many definitions for rural. Generally they appear to be stated in either statistical or socio-economic terms.

1.3.2.1. Statistical Definitions of Rural

Many countries use official statistical definitions for rural census data. The reason seems to be that such definitions provide a rationale for distributing scarce resources (Griffiths, 1992).

Writers from Statistics Canada and the Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2001) state that there are several statistical ways to define rural in Canada:

1. The Canada Census definition is either “Population living outside places of 1000 or more” or “population living outside places with densities of 400 or more people per square kilometre.”
2. The Rural and Small Town definition is “Population living outside the main commuting zone of larger urban centres (of 10,000 or more).”

3. The OECD definition of Rural Communities is “Population in communities with densities less than 150 people per square kilometre.”
 4. The Beale Code Approach defines Non-Metropolitan Regions as “Population living outside of regions with major settlements of 50,000 or more people.” (p. 7)
- Rios (1988) states that the United States Bureau of the Census defines rural as being the part of the population who do not live in “urbanized areas and places of 2,500 or more located outside urbanized areas.” Sher (1994) states that the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines rural as “open countryside and population clusters of less than 1000 people” while the Australian Commonwealth defines rural as “all non-metropolitan places having fewer than 100,000 residents” (p. 11).

Some rural researchers also use statistical measures to define rural. For example, the Griffiths’ Service Access Frame (Griffiths, 1992) is based on three criteria:

1. Population centre size (which he considers a well established indicator of services available)
2. Time-cost-distance unit (the average cost to travel to a rural area)
3. The economic resources available in a rural community (which allow or prevent it from overcoming access to service disadvantages) (p. 55).

According to rural library researcher Bernard Vavrek (1995b), a public library is rural if it serves a community of no more than 25,000 people (p. 23). Staff from Statistics Canada and the Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (du Plessis, et al., 2001) comment that, because definitions of rural vary widely, the percentage of the Canadian population living in rural areas can vary quite significantly depending on which definition is used (p. 9). Therefore it is often difficult to compare rural studies in a meaningful way.

1.3.2.2. Socio-economic Definitions of Rural

Socio-economic definitions of rural tend to contrast rural lifestyles with urban lifestyles. This suggests that it is appropriate to view urban and rural as a binary word pair, similar to hot and cold or modern and postmodern. In other words, rural can be seen as not urban and urban can be seen as not rural.

A well-known early example of a socio-economic definition which makes use of a binary pair is Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* which has been taken to mean rural or natural and *Gesellschaft* which has been taken to mean urban or structured (Martinez-Brawley, 2000).

Many socio-economic definitions of rural build on notions similar to *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. For example, compared to urban areas, rural areas are said to be characterized by "lack of anonymity" (Herbert, 1990; Martinez-Brawley, 2000, Sinclair & Squires, 1990). Lack of anonymity can be seen as a positive thing, in that everyone knows who you are. It can also be seen as a negative thing, in that in rural communities there is virtually no privacy. Likewise, Kitchen (1989) states that the basic difference between rural and urban people is that "while urban people tend to specialize by occupation, rural people must be able to do many things for themselves, some of which require highly developed skills" (p. 18). This can also be seen as either positive or negative in that while it suggests that rural people are resourceful it also suggests that they do not have access to assistance that is available in urban areas.

Fellegi (1997)⁵, Chief Statistician of Canada, uses the socio-economic method of defining rural by categorizing several different types of rural Canadian census divisions using different socio-economic criteria. The types he defines are:

1. Urban frontier: This is a group of census divisions with a larger city or adjacent to a metropolitan area with “outcome” characteristics similar to the primary settlements—namely, higher incomes, higher educational levels, a skilled workforce and a service-based economy.
2. Rural nirvana: This is a group of census divisions that represent outmigration of citydwellers to the countryside. Skills and income levels are high. Residents are likely to commute to work and to remain economically and socially integrated to nearby cities.
3. Agro-rural: This group of census divisions is characterized by rapid population decline, out-migration of the young, moderate income levels but a high degree of dependence on government services for employment and a relatively high dependency on government social transfer payments.
4. Rural enclave: This group of census divisions have few economic opportunities. Employment sectors that are present, such as manufacturing, fishing and forestry, tend to be in decline. The resulting outcome is low income levels, a high proportion of families below the low income cut-off and a high rate of dependency on government transfer income. Education levels tend to be below average and young people tend to stay within the area.

⁵ Fellegi (1996) and others cited from websites do not have page numbers. To locate the source for this and other sources retrieved from the Internet, go to the url listed in the References (American Psychological Association, 2001).

5. Resourced areas: This group of census divisions is dominated by mining and oil. There are young family structures, well educated, with high and stable levels of income.

He also uses the terms, Primary Settlement and Native North, but does not appear to define them.

1.3.2.3. Vancouver Island Regional Library – a Rural Library

I think the Vancouver Island Regional Library can be described as rural based on both statistical definitions and socio-economic definitions.

If we use Vavrek's (1995a)⁶ statistical definition of rural as being a community of no more than 25,000 people, 35 of the 36 communities that are home to Vancouver Island Regional Library branch libraries can be considered rural communities. The City of Nanaimo, which has a population of approximately 76,000 people and is home to two branch libraries, is the only community that is not rural according to this meaning of the term.

According to Fellegi's (1997) definition of Canadian rural census divisions, the parts of southern Vancouver Island where Sooke, Sidney and North Saanich, Ladysmith, Nanaimo, Parksville and Qualicum Beach are located are rural Urban Frontier. The parts of southern Vancouver Island where Duncan, North Cowichan, Lake Cowichan, and Chemainus are located are Rural Nirvana. The remainder of Vancouver Island, much of the Mainland Coast and the Queen Charlotte Islands are rural Resourced Areas. Unfortunately over the past decade communities in northern

⁶ Vavrek (1995) and others are cited from online magazine databases do not have page numbers. To locate the source for this and other sources retrieved from online databases, go to the online database listed in the References (American Psychological Association, 2001).

Vancouver Island, including Port Hardy, Port McNeill, Sointula, Port Alberni, Tahsis, Gold River, and Sayward, have declined economically and it seems possible that they may be moving toward becoming Rural Enclaves. The Central Coast Area where Bella Coola is located is classified as Native North by Fellegi.

1.3.3. Integrated Regional Library System

An integrated library system is one type of library within an array of different types of public libraries such as municipal libraries, public library associations, reading rooms, and different types of library systems.

According to Long (1996) there are three different types of library systems:

1. Federated library systems are loosely knit organizations. Each rural library remains independent but, when necessary, can call upon system consultants for help in such things as staff training, book selection, installing technology, writing grant applications, and so on.
2. Library systems formed for one purpose include systems that share some service, such as the same automated software program or the same collection management initiative.
3. Integrated library systems are tightly knit institutions formed when a number of political jurisdictions join together to create one large library system with many local branches. All aspects of the organization are integrated, including board, staff, budget, collection and technology.

The Vancouver Island Regional Library fits Long's (1996) definition of an integrated library system. The *British Columbia Library Act* (1995)⁷, uses the term *regional library district* to describe the structure of the Vancouver Island Regional. For the purposes of this thesis, an integrated library system means a tightly knit institution formed when several local government bodies (i.e. incorporated and unincorporated areas) join together to create one large library system with many local branches. All aspects of the organization are integrated, including the board, personnel, budget, the collection and technology. The organization has taxing authority and has all the powers of a corporation. The Vancouver Island Regional Library fits this definition.

1.3.3.1. Facts about the Vancouver Island Regional Library

I think it is useful, here, to provide some facts about the Vancouver Island Regional Library since it is the subject of this thesis. The Vancouver Island Regional Library Webpage <www.virl.bc.ca> (2002) lists the following facts:

1. The Vancouver Island Regional Library is a regional library...with administrative offices located in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.
2. It was founded in 1936 and is currently rated the ninth largest public library in Canada based on population served.
3. It serves approximately 400,000 people through 37 branch libraries on Vancouver Island (excluding most of Greater Victoria), the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the Central British Columbia Coast.
4. Approximately half the population in the area have library cards.

⁷ According to Section 14 of the Act, a "regional library district" is formed when "two or more municipalities and one or more regional districts each representing one or more electoral participating areas ... by bylaw, enter into an agreement to request the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish a regional library district."

5. In 2002 approximately 4,500,000 items were loaned and approximately 260,000 reference questions were answered.
6. The library has Public Internet Access Stations available in each of its locations and it makes available a variety of online resources, such as magazine databases and the online catalogue.
7. The website offers online services such as placing a hold, renewing an item and asking a reference question.
8. The collection includes the types of materials most public libraries provide, including adult and children's fiction and non-fiction, videos and DVDs, cassettes and CDs, audiobooks for the print impaired, magazines and newspapers, and reference materials.
9. Its annual budget is more than \$13.5 million Canadian.

Other facts not included in the Website but available through Vancouver Island

Regional Library internal documents include:

1. The library is staffed by 32 professional librarians, 5 financial and human resources specialists, 5 computer technicians, 175 clerical staff, and approximately 100 part-time student workers called *pages*.
2. Most of the staff is unionized: 28 of the professional librarians belong to the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU); 4 of the technicians and all the clerks belong to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). There is a management team of 9 non-unionized people.
3. A board of 35 members, all of whom are elected politicians representing the 26 municipalities and 9 regional districts that form the Regional Library, governs the library.

4. In 2002, the Regional Library went through a major reorganization which included a change in staff titles. For example, *area librarians* became *library managers* and *branch heads* became *circulation supervisors*. The interviews and focus groups on which this research is based took place before the reorganization. I will therefore use the old job titles in this thesis.

In chapters five to seven, the perceptions of the stakeholders provide a richer picture of the library than can be understood from the brief facts mentioned above.

1.3.4. The Question Clarified

I think the question, “Can a postmodern interpretation offer new insights into a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?” can now be understood as, “Can an interpretation (that recognizes the difference between modern and postmodern philosophical standpoints) offer new ways of understanding the Vancouver Island Regional Library (a large integrated public library system that provides library services to small, rural and remote communities on the west coast of Canada) in the contemporary postmodern social condition?”

Interestingly, this question is not the question I thought I was answering when I first started to read the literature and interview the stakeholders. At that point, my question was, “How do people living in rural communities, served by an integrated public library system, perceive and experience public library service in their community?” As I reflected on the literature, the data and my own experience, it gradually became apparent that what I wanted to say no longer applied to this question. I revised the question to, “Can insights from modern and postmodern standpoints help make sense of the contradictory views, beliefs, and opinions of stakeholders in an integrated regional public library serving rural communities at the beginning of the 21st century?” Again my insights evolved and it became apparent that this question no

longer linked to the meanings I was finding in the data and literature. I changed the question to, “Can a hermeneutic interpretation of stakeholders’ modern and postmodern comments offer new insights into issues faced by a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?” In my final revision I decided to omit the references to methodology and my question became, “Can a postmodern interpretation offer new insights into a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?” In other words, I worked through hermeneutic cycles between my interpretation of the data, the literature, my pre-understandings, and the way I chose to express the question.

I want to point out that, while I think the answer to the research question is probably yes, the answer is not the only thing that is important. What is also important is the story of the exploration. Kvale (1996) makes this point quite poetically when he describes this type of research as falling within the “traveler metaphor” which “understands the interviewer as a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told on returning home.” Kvale’s traveler may roam “freely” or may “seek specific sites or topics.” On returning home the traveler’s tales may be “remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact upon the listeners.” While the journey may lead to new knowledge, “the traveler might change as well” (p. 4). This suggests that the research question can be seen as a road map for a journey. The fact that the research question keeps changing as the thesis progresses suggests that the thesis evolves in the same way that a journey does, with many unexpected changes of plan. It is only in the telling of the story that the research question is finally clarified.

I hope that by using the convention of the research question and by providing some insights into the meaning of the key terms used in the question, I have set the

parameters for the rest of this thesis and offered readers the opportunity to understand what this thesis is attempting to do.

1.4. Rationale for Investigating the Topic

Although postmodern thought seems to shy away from purposes and causal relations, for a moderate postmodernist like myself, there needed to be a reason for conducting this study. I think doing this study is worthwhile because it appears to have significance, in terms of gaps in the literature of library and information science, and relevance, in terms of many issues related to rural public libraries.

1.4.1. Significance

This study has significance because it helps to fill gaps in the literature related to two aspects of public libraries. These are the literature regarding postmodern thought and public libraries and the literature related to rural public libraries.

1.4.1.1. Gaps in the Literature Regarding Libraries and Postmodern Thought

Library scholars note that there is very little literature focusing on the ways that postmodern thought can influence and enhance our understanding of libraries. For example, Muddiman (1999) comments,

The notion of a postmodern social and intellectual context is one that has penetrated many disciplines, from architecture, arts and humanities in the seventies and eighties through to education, the social sciences, theoretical science and now applied areas like management science. However, its discourse has only marginally impinged on the information and library sciences.

My review of postmodern library literature (see chapter two) seems consistent

with Muddiman's view. Of the numerous⁸ articles and books related to library and information science that have been published during the past decade, only a handful focus on libraries and postmodern thought. Most are based in the positivist paradigm. Many of those that do examine what appear to be postmodern issues, for example Birdsall's (1997) concern about the "ideology of information technology" and Mann's (2001) "important insights about ultimate reality that underlie our civilization," do not see these issues in terms of postmodern thought and do not use the term postmodern.

Other social sciences have recognized the problems with positivism for some time, and have adopted an approach that recognizes the value of both modern and postmodern thought. For example, in regard to education research, Michael Apple (1996), an American sociologist of education, comments,

While I have no wish at all to return to the days of unbridled positivism (there were reasons for the decades of critiques against it), we may need to take much more seriously the losses that accompanied the largely progressive move toward, say, qualitative work⁹.

The majority of scholars in the field of library and information science have failed to seriously engage in considering how postmodern thought might help us to understand libraries differently. Instead of developing new ways of dealing with current problems,

⁸ A search, on July 26, 2002, of Malaspina University College's *Academic Search Elite* database using the keyword "library" found a total of 54,689 articles. A search using "public library" found a total of 6,065 articles. The version of *Academic Search Elite* subscribed to by Malaspina on that date provides "full text for more than 1,690 academic, social sciences, humanities, general science, education and multi-cultural journals. In addition to the full text, this database offers indexing and abstracts for 2,794 journals. More than 1,880 journals are peer reviewed. Full text backfiles go as far back as January of 1990, while indexing and abstract backfiles go as far back as January of 1984."

⁹ The "losses" I think Apple refers to are some postmodern researchers' lack of understanding that quantitative and qualitative work can be both positivist and nonpositivist. I discuss this issue in chapter four.

as is happening in the other social sciences, they continue to use the traditional scientific model of librarianship which originated in the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (Muddiman, 1999). Cornelius (1996) suggests that this model is not working. He says,

Attempts to hold on to this ultimately unsuccessful scientific model of true inquiry have merely obscured the unpleasant facts that such a model never did work for the whole profession and now applies even less in a world in which “scientific” models are being rejected and replaced throughout the social sciences. (p. 7)

It appears that making postmodern thought about libraries more available will only happen when library literature includes more articles and books on the subject. Even this is not simple. As Kvale (1992) says,

It is difficult to present a new mode of thinking without being caught in old categories of thought. Discussions of postmodernism tend to get entangled in modernist dichotomies. This may be due to the failure of writers on postmodernity to get beyond modern polarities of thought, or to the tendency of readers to view postmodern texts through modern binary glasses. (p. 6)

Nonetheless, it seems clear that postmodernism has entered the discourse of the other social sciences through the publication of articles and books and the presentation of papers at scholarly conferences. This appears to be the way it will also happen for libraries and librarianship.

I think this thesis has significance because it will contribute in some way to the small body of literature related to libraries and postmodern thought that currently does exist and may perhaps encourage others to also contribute to this literature. In chapter two, I will briefly review current postmodern library literature.

1.4.1.2. Gaps in the Literature of Rural Public Libraries

The literature devoted specifically to rural public libraries also appears to be fairly modest in content. An interesting source of information about rural libraries is a 1995 issue of *Library Trends*, which focused entirely on rural libraries. Another source is the

small quarterly periodical, *rural libraries*¹⁰, which is published by the Center for Rural Librarianship at Clarion University of Pennsylvania where Bernard Vavrek is the Director. There seems to be no literature focusing on a postmodern understanding of rural libraries and very little which focuses on integrated regional libraries (Long, 1996).

I think this thesis has significance because it will contribute to filling a gap in rural library literature. In chapter two, I will briefly review the literature related to rural public libraries.

1.4.2 Relevance

I think that this thesis has relevance because it offers new insights for practice, not just for the Vancouver Island Regional Library, but also for other public libraries. Although I am working from a moderate postmodern perspective, which is at ease with a high level of contingency and uncertainty and generally does not attempt to inspire action, I think that this investigation can offer some pragmatic solutions.

I recognize that, because this thesis is about one specific library, its findings are not generalizable. They apply specifically to the Vancouver Island Regional Library and its particular context. Indeed, one of my purposes in undertaking this study was that it should be useful, quite specifically, to the Vancouver Island Regional Library board and staff. I do not claim that the ideas evoked in this study are representative of any wider situation. They cannot, for example, be generalized into “a new understanding of the postmodern library.”

However, it is possible that this study has relevance for people with an interest in libraries. This is because I explore an approach to understanding public libraries that is

¹⁰ The periodical's title appears entirely in lower case both on the cover and within the publication..

grounded in changing views about knowledge, society, culture and economics sometimes described as postmodern. It is not just libraries in British Columbia that exist in this new context and must try to orient themselves to meet its challenges. Throughout the Western World, librarians and those who care about public libraries need to take practical steps to prepare for the future. I think my main finding, which is that postmodern thought does seem to provide insights into a rural regional library at the beginning of the 21st century may have particular relevance for other libraries. I hope that library theorists and people with an interest in libraries derive insights from this study that they can apply to issues arising in their own unique situations.

1.5. Outline of the Thesis

As mentioned earlier, although I am writing this thesis from a moderate postmodern perspective, I am following most of the conventions of a traditional modernist research thesis. For example, I began by clarifying the research question to provide a road map for the reader. I am also including a traditional literature review chapter, a description of my methodology, a report of my findings, and a final conclusion or synthesis. I am trying to impose order on the whole endeavour by using chapters and subheadings which flow in, what I hope will be seen as, a logical sequence.

I have started with the prologue, in which I described, from my own experience, the difficulties of coming to an understanding of positivism and postmodern thought.

In the first chapter, after stating the research question, I expanded upon it by describing what I mean by the key terms. I mentioned that the research appears to be worthwhile because it has significance, in terms of the literature of library and information science, and relevance, in terms of many issues related to rural public libraries. I am concluding the chapter with this outline of the thesis.

In the second chapter I will review two relevant types of library literature—the literature of library and information science that discusses postmodern philosophical thought and the literature related to rural libraries.

In the third chapter I will describe my research methodology. I will begin by reviewing, what I consider to be, my epistemological/ontological position. I will describe my ethical considerations and the unique biases and resources I think I bring to the study. I will then describe the methods I used to collect and code data and interpret the results.

In the fourth chapter I will describe my conceptual framework:

1. The first concept is that modernism and postmodernism are substantively different.
2. The second concept is that it is possible to identify within the literature of postmodern social theorists, issues where the modern and postmodern perspectives are clearly different.
3. The third concept is that the differences between modern and postmodern perspectives are identifiable.
4. The fourth concept is that, by interpreting hermeneutically comments that we have identified as being modern or postmodern, we can develop a different way of understanding the Vancouver Island Regional Library.
5. The fifth concept is that, from this hermeneutic interpretation, we may be able to develop new pragmatic strategies.

I will use ideas from postmodern social theorists to fill out this conceptual framework. In effect, I will pull apart the modern and postmodern standpoints these social scientists describe and then put them back together as a series of “modern/postmodern themes” that seem relevant to rural public libraries.

In the fifth chapter I will describe the data, created through open-ended interview questions, that seems to be related to the modern/postmodern epistemological themes. I will try to interpret stakeholders' comments about each theme in terms of modern and postmodern standpoints. In musing about the comments, I will suggest new ways of looking at related library issues. The modern/postmodern epistemological themes included in chapter five are modern and postmodern views about

1. Universal truth
2. The character of knowledge
3. Validity of beliefs
4. The knowing subject
5. Language
6. Binaries
7. Role of author
8. Organization of knowledge
9. Increase in information
10. Role of professionals
11. Original thoughts and intertextuality.

In the sixth chapter I will interpret, in a similar way, the data that I think is related to the modern/postmodern themes that are linked to the postmodern social condition.

These themes include modern and postmodern views about

1. Power
2. Panoptic principle
3. Social problems
4. Significant groups
5. Feminism

6. Culture
7. Paranormal beliefs and religion
8. Waged work
9. Bureaucracy.

In the seventh and final chapter I will suggest that a number of the basic tenets of public librarianship should be questioned. They are

1. The neutral stance
2. The marginalization of gender issues
3. Evaluating complete correct answers to reference questions
4. The scientific nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification system
5. The intrinsic difference between fiction and non-fiction
6. The practice of penalizing people who fail to return materials “on time”
7. The effectiveness of library bureaucracy
8. The effectiveness of library planning
9. The importance of the balanced collection
10. The requirement for public libraries to support intellectual freedom
11. The superiority of professional librarians compared to other library workers
12. The need for more tax support for public libraries.

I will also suggest some pragmatic strategies that seem relevant to the Vancouver Island Regional Library.

In the epilogue, I will describe how I think doing this research has affected me in my day-to-day life and as the Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library.

In the “before” and “after” sections of the prologue, chapters, and epilogue, I will try to give the illusion that I am stepping outside my thesis to talk about the experience

of writing it. I italicize those sections to suggest that they are somehow different from the official body of the thesis. However, I consider them to be integral to the thesis since they suggest how difficult it is to describe a postmodern understanding of public libraries in ways that a modern reader can understand. In other words, they imply that my earlier recommendation that librarians and library theorists pay attention to the postmodern condition in which libraries exist as well as to the postmodern ideas that help us understand it may not be easy.

Throughout my thesis, I will attempt to use language that is acceptable within academic discourse. However, I have chosen not to use language based on fear—neither fear of library scholars who despise postmodernism nor fear of postmodern theorists who prefer to use, what I consider to be, a difficult, jargon-laden way of speaking. In other words I will use ordinary language that is, I think, sufficiently contingent to sustain my moderate postmodern position. I am basing this decision on my interpretation of Shotter's (1997) notion that it will avoid the "kind of violence at work in intellectual debates and discussions" (p. 17). My intention, in writing this way, is that this thesis will be meaningful to both modernists and postmodernists.

Throughout the main body of the thesis, as well as in the "before" and "after" sections, I will use the first personal pronoun, I. There is a difference between the I of the italicized sections and the I of the body of the text. As the researcher, both voices belong to me. However, while the I of the "before" and "after" sections openly admits to struggling with the challenges of writing about postmodernism within the conventions of a traditional thesis, the I of the main body of the text simply forges ahead.

1.6. Conclusion

Chapter one has introduced this thesis. I began by defining the research question and then described what I meant by the key terms. I explained why I think this research is worthwhile and concluded with an outline of the seven chapters.

The next chapter reviews two types of literature that are relevant to this study:

1. Literature related to library scholars' views of the value of postmodern thought for library and information science
2. Literature related to rural libraries.

After Chapter One

I finished my moderate postmodern version chapter one in the summer of 2002.

I felt that the language worked and that I had a good outline.

All that seemed to lie ahead was colouring inside the lines.

Before Chapter Two

While I was in the Masters program, I spent a year reading about, what positivist library writers call, the roles and purposes of public libraries. It was during that year that I first read about postmodern thought and libraries.

The literature review I wrote was the piece of writing I used to apply for upgrading from the Masters program to a PhD.

I liked that piece of writing. I liked it a lot. I wanted it to be part of my chapter two literature review.

But the thesis had gone off in a different direction and it did not belong.

I deleted it from the chapter with a tap of a key and saved the file for another day.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

As I mentioned in chapter one, I recognize it is customary for a researcher, engaged in writing a PhD thesis, to study the body of literature that seems to be relevant to the question, and write a literature review chapter as part of the paper. Such a review can set the scholarly context for the thesis and link the thesis to the literature in which it is grounded. I think it is interesting to think about a thesis as being linked to related literatures in terms of the postmodern concept of intertextuality. Barthes (1977), quoted by Fox (1995), describes intertextuality as “the process whereby one text plays upon other texts, the ways in which texts refer endlessly to further elements within the realm of cultural production... Intertextuality is a feature of every text” (p. 1). This thesis refers to and plays upon at least three different types of texts or literature in different ways. They are

1. Literature related to postmodern philosophical thought about libraries
2. Literature related to rural public libraries
3. Literature which suggests that postmodern thought is of value to the social sciences.

First, this thesis can be seen to refer to and play upon the literature related to postmodern thought about libraries. It was Black and Muddiman’s (1997), *Understanding Community Librarianship: The Public Library in Postmodern Britain*, that prompted me to pursue this research in the first place. In their book, Black and Muddiman comment that, while librarians generally show “little conscious recognition of the term (postmodernism)” (p. 11), many contemporary social scientists have consciously adopted “postmodernism as a template for interpreting virtually any social practice.” Their suggestion that analysis of the contemporary public library must refer

“to social and cultural theory, each of which has in recent decades been characterized by postmodernism” (p. 9) encouraged me to consider looking look at the Vancouver Island Regional Library in this way. I will briefly describe the literature related to postmodern thought about libraries in section two of this chapter.

Second, this thesis can be seen to refer to and play upon the literature of rural public libraries. The Vancouver Island Regional Library is a rural library and anything written about it is, in some way, part of the literature of rural public libraries. I will briefly describe the literature of rural public libraries in section three of this chapter.

Third, this thesis can be seen to refer to, and play upon, the literature that describes the ways that postmodern thought can benefit the social sciences. I will use ideas found in this literature to develop the conceptual framework on which this research is based. Interestingly, I have not found, in the literature related to postmodern philosophical thought about libraries, any references to the literature regarding ways that postmodern thought can benefit the social sciences. Instead, writers refer directly to the original postmodern thinkers. I think this absence of intertextuality makes postmodern library literature less interesting and complex than it would be if the work of the postmodern social theorists were referred to. I think that postmodern social theorists have new and different perspectives about postmodern thought that go beyond the work of the original postmodern thinkers. These ideas can broaden our understanding of public libraries. I will introduce ideas from this literature in chapter four when I describe the conceptual framework upon which this research is based.

Since none of these three literatures appear to refer directly to each other, but all are referred to and played upon by this thesis, I think this thesis can be seen to link them together in new and interesting, intertextual ways.

2.2. Literature Review of Postmodern Philosophical Thought about Libraries

As mentioned in chapter one, the literature related to postmodern philosophical thought about libraries is quite limited. Those theorists, who do write about it, appear to see their views as being outside the main body of contemporary library and information science (LIS)¹¹ literature. For example, Trosow (2001) notes that his article on standpoint epistemology is written

not from the point of view of mainstream LIS research but from its critical margins. Instead of locating this inquiry in the main body of LIS research literature and working out, the article will begin “at the periphery” by reviewing the work of authors who have already taken a particularly critical approach.

It is not clear why the majority of library theorists have not adopted a postmodern perspective. It may be related to their lack of interest in other disciplines and their failure to recognize that postmodern viewpoints are becoming mainstream for many social sciences (Harris, 1986b; Trosow, 2001). It may be related to LIS’s longstanding interest in the practical “hows” of library practice, rather than the “whys” (Gorman, 2000; Muddiman, 1999; Trosow, 2001; Wisner, 2000). It may be related to editorial policies of library journals that use positivist standards to determine which manuscripts to publish (Wallace & Van Fleet, 1998). It may also be related to the quality of the writing of some postmodern library theorists. As mentioned below, while much of the writing is clear and compelling, some is quite difficult to follow.

Although there is relatively little published work by postmodern library theorists, what there is attempts to deconstruct many of the modern and positivist assumptions which dominate contemporary LIS thinking.

¹¹ American writers seem to use the term “library and information science” (LIS) while British writers seem to use the term “information and library science” (ILS). In this thesis I have adopted the American form.

2.2.1. Overview of the Literature

The postmodern library writers I focus on in this literature review are those who talk about postmodernism fairly broadly. The American writers I have included in this literature review are John Budd, I.V. Cornelius, Ivan Dick, Michael Harris, Gary (G. P) Radford, Marie (M. L). Radford and Samuel Trosow. The British writers are Alistair Back and David Muddiman. Within their national boundaries, these writers co-author articles and cite one another's works.

There are other writers who discuss fairly limited aspects of postmodern thought. For example, Birger Hjørland and Hanne Albrechtsen (1991), Francis Miksa (1998), and Hope Olson (2001) all discuss postmodern issues related to library cataloguing and classification. I discuss their ideas in chapters five, six and seven.

While most other LIS writers seem to simply ignore postmodern thought, some comment on the concept of postmodernism and libraries in a negative way. The most outspoken is anti-postmodern library writer William Wisner. I found his book, *Whither the Postmodern Library*, (Wisner, 2000) to be a "rant" against new library technology and an expression of longing for the days when the modern canon dominated the university curriculum. According to one reviewer, Wisner's book, "fails to adequately define the 'postmodern library' although one might infer from his comments that it is controlled by some very sinister technological bogeymen" (Malinowski, 2001, p. 67). Other LIS writers I see as being "anti-postmodern" include Jim Zwadlo, Walt Crawford, Michael Gorman and Blaise Cronin. I will include comments from these anti-postmodernists as a foil to the ideas proposed by the theorists who are exploring a postmodern philosophy for libraries.

I think it is interesting that the anti-postmodern LIS writers tend to use what might be called a "colourful" approach in their writing. For example:

1. Wisner (2000) speaking against information technology, comments, “Information technology (and we all know exactly what that means, from the Internet to an unthinkable Virtual Reality just around the corner) is promiscuous, prurient, addictive” (p. 24).
2. Zwadlo (1997), speaking ironically about positivism’s ability to reinvent itself, comments, “Like the plasmodium¹², positivism has infiltrated the body of science, causing periodic bouts of fevers and chills” (p. 105).
3. Crawford and Gorman (1995), talking about pluralist culture, comment, “In terror of being considered out of date, many librarians have tacitly agreed on the false egalitarianism that does not allow a qualitative distinction between, say, reading War and Peace and watching MTV” (p. 109).

I find this type of language to be troubling. Shotter (1997) describes it as a kind of “academic violence” arising from fear of the “Other” (p. 17). I see it also as an indication that traditional positivist library theorists are perplexed and possibly fearful of postmodern understandings of LIS. Rather than trying to understand the value of postmodern thought, they seem to lash out verbally against it. This is problematic since it means that a meaningful scholarly dialogue between modernists and postmodernists is unlikely to happen soon. However it is useful to remember that, as I noted in the prologue, coming to understand postmodernism, especially recognizing one’s own positivist paradigm, is quite difficult. Perhaps it is not surprising that feelings appear to run high.

¹² Plasmodium is the agent of malaria.

2.2.2. Positivism

As mentioned earlier, I think that the positivist paradigm dominates mainstream library and information science literature. G. P. Radford (1998) puts it this way: “The field of library and information science has taken, both explicitly and implicitly, a model of knowledge developed by the positivist social sciences as the basis for describing the nature of the library.” Budd (1995) comments that positivism is the “governing epistemology” of library and information science and that “its ascendance has resulted in both a philosophical stance and a mode of behavior” (p. 295).

Writing in 1997, G. P. Radford and Budd (1997) seem less critical of positivism than they are in their later work. For example, in 1997, they comment that positivism “has allowed for the establishment and growth of some of the social sciences, has given a basis for knowledge claim, . . . has been useful in enabling research initiatives to grow,” and “has afforded a rationale for objectivity and value neutrality that have been the mainstays of social science practice and inquiry for many years.” The problem with positivism that is of concern in the 1997 article is “that its functioning as an epistemological foundation has not been recognized. It has remained latent, assumed, and taken for granted, and, as such, has not been subjected to much critical scrutiny” (p. 318).

In 1998, G. P. Radford (1998) appears to take a more critical approach when he comments that “the positivist model of knowledge . . . may be contributing to a profound lack of understanding of how people experience their interactions with the modern academic library.” I think that this also applies to contemporary public libraries.

One of the problems associated with the positivist perspective (which appears to be seen as a benefit in G. P. Radford and Budd’s 1997 article) is the concept that it is possible and necessary for libraries and librarians to be neutral and unbiased. Trosow

(2001) cites Harris (1986a) as stating that neutrality “has been raised to a guiding principle of the profession as a whole and permeates not only the research in LIS but the concrete practice of librarianship as well.” While neutrality may have arisen from “the profession’s historical concern for intellectual freedom... as it has developed, librarianship has come to see itself as a passive and apolitical force expected to be completely neutral on social, economic, and political questions.” I will discuss some of the problems related to librarians’ belief in the neutral stance in more depth in chapters five, six and seven.

While postmodern library writers seem concerned by positivism, some anti-postmodern writers appear to be actively in favour of it. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they are “anti-anti-positivism.” For example, Budd (2001a) quotes Cronin (1995, p. 53) as commenting, “Within certain sections of the LIS research community there has emerged in recent years a virulently anti-positivist strain which actively promotes unscientific values” (p. 510). Zwadlo (1997) tries to raise a conundrum when he states, “if we claim that positivism was or is the philosophy of LIS, we cannot criticize it without becoming practitioners of it... We cannot criticize or attack positivism, replace it, ignore it, and it will not just go away” (p. 108). I think that, while it is difficult to completely eliminate positivism, recognizing how positivism influences our beliefs, opinions and values and the ways we express them is, in itself, a meaningful non-positivist position. I think it describes the position of moderate postmodernists like myself. Looking at positivism from this non-positivist perspective makes Zwadlo’s reasoning meaningless. We can escape from positivism once we recognize we are caught up in it.

A number of alternative epistemologies that could replace positivism are suggested in the literature. Dick (1995) comments, “As positivism recedes as the only

viable model of the social sciences, several theoretical candidates are... vying for supremacy” (p. 229). He goes on to suggest that no one epistemological position should be selected. Instead “holistic perspectivism” which includes a variety of epistemologies such as “standpoint epistemology, cognitivism, poststructuralism, phenomenology, positivism, and so forth” should be adopted (p. 319). Other postmodern library theorists also suggest other non-positivist epistemologies for LIS:

1. G. P. Radford (1998) suggests that “the perspective of literary criticism” can be used to critique both positivism and “the conception of the library it supports.” He uses this method in, what I think is, a very compelling way in his article, *Flaubert, Foucault, and the Bibliotheque Fantastique: Toward a Postmodern Epistemology for Library Science*. I quote from this article quite frequently in this thesis.
2. Muddiman (1999) suggests that “academic postmodernists” will seek “new disciplinary configurations and methodologies based on pluralism and relativism.”
3. Budd (1995) suggests that “hermeneutical phenomenology supplant positivism” because it “opens the inquirer to possibilities instead of barricading avenues” (p. 304).
4. Cornelius (1996) suggests using interpretive hermeneutics because its approach “does not require agreement to universal statements or conformity to rigid and possibly unattainable logic. It is firmly rooted in our interpretation of experience” (p. 18).
5. Hannigan and Crew (1993) suggest that feminist theory “provides a theoretical framework for a rethinking of the philosophy of librarianship” (p. 31) and recommend that “a critical analysis of the theories from which librarians and library educators have drawn for library practice, combined with newer feminist theories, can be the basis for a research agenda that will give a different, and more

powerful, face to the body of knowledge in librarianship and information sciences” (p. 32).

6. Trosow (2001) recommends standpoint epistemology as a good base for LIS research. This is because “standpoint epistemology, as a critique of existing power-knowledge relationships, provides a useful strategy for the project of reconceptualizing LIS research.”
7. According to Richardson (1992), Butler, who “recanted” from the positivist scientific position he held in the 1930s (see below), “argues for something more—a deeper, spiritual librarianship” (p. ix).

2.2.3. Need for a New Philosophical Foundation for Libraries

Related to postmodern library theorists’ interest in epistemologies other than positivism is their interest in abandoning modernism and developing a new postmodern philosophy for librarianship.

Black and Muddiman (1997) claim that “public libraries are a product of modern society,” suggesting that,

As promoters of individual and universal betterment, as investors in the idea of progress, as purveyors of rational science, education and recreation and as agencies run by expert-professionals often in accordance with strict rules and bureaucratic structures, public libraries match with astonishing precision the criteria of a modern social agency operating within the overall project of modernity. (p. 8)

Muddiman (1999) also states that “The roots of information and library science lie very firmly in the ‘modern’. Historically, the expansion of libraries and librarianship is contemporaneous with the growth of modern societies in Western Europe and North America in the period 1750-1950.” Libraries had a clear role during this period since “they helped legitimise and control an accepted body of ‘public’ knowledge which formed a recorded narrative of civilisation’s progress and the basis for its further

advance.” Muddiman goes on to suggest that, “In recent times, however, such claims for the ‘modern’ project of information and library science, and its goal of an ordered, enlightened information society, have attracted a number of critics.” This is because the Enlightenment project is itself being criticized for ignoring “the culture of large majorities of the world’s population: women; non-Europeans; the poor, and so on.” Since contemporary information and library science reflect this culture it “has thus helped construct a privileged form of knowledge which, far from being universal, amounts to a partial yet dominant culture which is male, European, positivist and humanist.” Moreover, “Other” voices “are misrepresented or excluded in ILS.” The solution appears to be adoption of a new philosophy of ILS based in postmodern thought.

Other postmodern library theorists seem to concur. For example, Cornelius (1996) suggests that “new movements in social philosophy can be used both to discover a better epistemology for the subject (LIS) and to improve the profession’s sense of itself by offering an alternative, and comprehensible, framework of explanation” (p. 14). G. P. Radford and Budd (1997) state that if “the invisible epistemological structures and paradigms of our field” are not raised to “philosophical scrutiny” librarians will have no way to determine the limits of their field, “no means to describe and understand how the roles and relationships within library institutions become constituted” and “no means of understanding how knowledge about library processes is generated and given validity in library scholarship” (p. 320). Dick (1995) suggests that radical library transformers “contend that the library profession ought to examine critically the interests and values that its discipline subscribes to by concealing others.” He suggests that transformers envision a professional discipline that is aware of the “scope and nature of bias embedded in selection policies and tools of access such as indexes and catalogs” (p. 22).

However, outside this narrow group of postmodern theorists there seems to be a general lack of interest in developing a new philosophy for LIS. For example, anti-postmodernist Zwadlo (1997) takes the position that librarians and information scientists do not need a philosophical basis at all. He comments that, “Perhaps one reason why many librarians do not miss a philosophy of LIS is that writers on library and information science rarely discuss philosophy” (p. 104). Anti-postmodernist Gorman (2000) acknowledges the contributions of two positivist philosophers (Jesse Shera and S.R. Ranganathan) but notes that “most achievements in librarianship are the result of problem solving and the pragmatic approach” (p. 16). Budd (1995) quotes Harris (1986a, p. 524) as suggesting that the absence of an interest in a library philosophy “suggests that the reluctance on the part of the library research community to examine its own domain assumptions is both deliberate and unconscious” (pp. 310-11). Muddiman (1999) suggests that the absence of interest in philosophy may be related to the fact that “the information and library sciences are framed by a rather uncritical acceptance of narratives of a socially progressive ‘information age’” which appears to eliminate the need for a philosophical perspective.

Muddiman (1999) suggests that “progressive notions of the information society... seriously misrepresents the nature of contemporary social reality” and argues that postmodernism “represents, at the very least, an alternative way of thinking about information, its disciplines and its educational curricula.” Postmodern discourse can be of value to library and information science. First, it “helps explain the relative decline of librarianship and, to some degree information science, which are seen as associated historically with the ‘modern’ project.” Second, it “provides a powerful analysis of the commodification of knowledge and helps explain, in material terms, the emergence of information management.” Third, it can “underpin a number of recent attempts to offer

a new direction for education for information, based, especially, on a broadly conceived ‘information’ science.” I interpret Muddiman as suggesting that although librarians may think that they are part of the information age because they deal with information, their actual influence is declining because they deal with information from the outdated modern, positivist perspective. Muddiman also offers a warning that there are difficulties in adopting a postmodern perspective: “Foremost among these is the complexity of the idea of the postmodern: it comprises a heterogeneous and to some degree contested set of concepts, theories and critical techniques.” In other words, we cannot ignore the fact that postmodern thought can be contradictory and does not provide libraries with a clear, alternate route. Instead it offers new ideas which can be explored, mused upon and possibly put into action.

Given the complexity of postmodern thought, it is not surprising that postmodern library philosophy can be distorted by writers who long for the certainty experienced in the early days of public libraries. Anti-postmodernist Wisner (2000) describes his view of a postmodern public library as follows:

All that remains, in this city, is a “library” playing catchup. No scholar, no reader, would ever take it seriously. Stripped of its trinkets, like its postmodern façade, there is only an infinitely regressing emptiness. Maybe that was the point. Show without substance, just like everything else. A “socially constructed” space lacking an “ideal,” empty of meaning, like the mall down the street, where the “products” (jeans, unguents for the skin, information, Herodotus) cannot be arranged in a hierarchy because they are all “relative.” (p. 97)

This description seems to be a caricature of what Muddiman and others are trying to describe.

Budd and Raber (1998) suggest that it is possible for libraries to be both modern and postmodern. They state “that the cultural state of the library can be seen as an uneasy amalgamation of elements that can be attributed to conceptions of the modern and the postmodern.” This is because “Modern and postmodern cultures share closely

related social and intellectual dynamics. The latter flows from the former, and so they share a history that dates from the seventeenth century” (p. 56). This viewpoint seems to be consistent with the question that this thesis is exploring. However, I think that Budd and Raber (1998) stretch the concept too far. For example, they suggest that G. P. Radford’s “discourse, while disputing the kinds of claims made by the previous creators of texts, also embodies, to some extent, an assimilation of the elements of the modern and the postmodern” (p. 67). Likewise, they suggest that *Output Measures for Public Libraries*, (Van House, Lynch, McClure, Zweiger, & Rodger, 1987), a practical work with no reference to postmodernism, displays “a tacit recognition of an underlying indeterminacy.” The example they use is that “one objective of the work is to assist libraries with evaluating effectiveness yet ‘effectiveness’ is not defined” (p. 70). It is possible that G. P. Radford slips into modern ways of writing occasionally. In fact, I think it is difficult not to do so in writing for the uninitiated. However, I would not call Van House, et al.’s thoroughly positivist handbook postmodern simply because it does not define the word effectiveness.

2.2.4. Paradigms

The literature of postmodern LIS includes a number of references to the terms, *paradigm* and *paradigm shift*. These terms are used in a variety of ways. I prefer to use the term *paradigm* to represent a viewpoint that restricts or contains the ways we are able to both perceive and express ideas. When we view reality through a particular *paradigm*, all our beliefs, assumptions, values and the ways we express them fall in line with that *paradigm*. If we shift to a different *paradigm* our beliefs, assumptions, values and the way we express them also change. G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford (2001) describe this meaning of the term when they state, “What is and can be considered a serious speech act is totally determined by the nature of the contextualizing *paradigm*.”

Beyond the paradigm that gives them significance, serious speech acts have no truth value.” Budd (2001b) also seems to refer to this meaning of paradigm when he comments, “The idea of Kuhn’s that has created the most stir among serious discussants is that of incommensurability. The adherents of competing paradigms are so grounded in their particular matrices that they are unable to communicate sensibly with one another” (p. 134). The shift from unwitting positivism to a realization that non-positivist perspectives are possible is an example of this type of paradigm shift. Hannigan and Crew’s (1993) “call for a new disciplinary paradigm with its roots in ‘the co-operative, participatory, interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical’ methodologies privileged in feminist theory” mentioned by Muddiman (1999) is another example of this meaning of paradigm shift.

In contrast, some modern and postmodern library theorists use the term paradigm in the way that I would use the term perspective or, perhaps, discourse. Dick (1995) comments on this when he states that most “references to paradigms seem to be no more than indications of broad trends or conceptual metaphors to distinguish one school of thought from another and are better signified as perspectives, models, concepts, and even ideologies” (p. 224).

An example of this way of using the term paradigm is Apostle and Raymond’s (1997) use of the terms, “Library Service and the Information paradigms” (p. xi) to describe the debate between those who think libraries are public sector service providers that are worthy of tax support and those who see them as entrepreneurial providers of information. Numerous other writers describe this change in perspective as being a change in paradigm. For example, Day (1998) mentions it when he comments, “Additional splits occur between public library practitioners working within the

librarianship paradigm and special librarians working within the information science paradigm.”

Even theorists who are familiar with postmodern thought describe the debate between these two perspectives in this way. For example, Black and Muddiman (1997) comment that in the 1990s the paradigm of “information, technology and commerce... began to erode the traditional public service culture of professional librarianship with more entrepreneurial and businesslike approach” (p. 100). Budd and Raber (1998) quote Weingand (1997, p. 3) as saying, “Librarians who flinch at the word customer are operating out of an outmoded paradigm. This older paradigm portrays the library as a ‘public good.’” The new paradigm is a library which must adopt and master “the language and techniques of its competitors,” in other words become businesslike and entrepreneurial, if it is to survive (p. 74).

I agree that the change in perspective between the library as a public sector service provider and the library as an entrepreneurial provider of information is significant. In my experience, people seem to hold firmly to whichever perspective they have chosen. However the issue is fairly narrow in scope and it is not difficult to keep both meanings in mind at the same time. I suggest that, even though these writers may be interested in postmodern thought, some of them have not made the paradigm shift from unwitting positivist to non-positivist paradigms and still see reality through the positivist paradigm. This may explain some of the difficulties I find with Budd’s work in particular. There appears to be a dissonance between his attempts to be postmodern and, what I think may be, his unwitting positivist viewpoint.

Zwadlo (1997) provides a colourful anti-postmodern foil to all this when he comments, “After all, if everyone believed that paradigm shifts really happen, that belief would become the new paradigm, and would, itself have to shift in order for a

paradigm shift to occur. In other words, paradigm shifts would have to stop happening in order to continue happening” (p. 109). For a non-positivist, the belief that paradigm shifts can occur is not in itself a new paradigm, but rather a new perspective. I suggest that Zwadlo’s argument, while amusing, is not persuasive.

2.2.5. Library and Information Science as Science

A number of people who write about postmodern philosophical thought and libraries discuss the issue of whether or not library and information science (LIS) is indeed a science. For example, Budd (2001b) notes, “at various points in the twentieth century some have searched for the science in library and information science; others have stated that there is little or nothing scientific about LIS; still others have urged us to first study what science is to see if there is any fit for our field” (p. 3).

It appears from the literature that the impetus to make LIS a science originated with scholars of the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (Muddiman, 1999). Budd (2001b) states that according to Harris (1986a, p. 518) “graduates of GLS dispersed to most library education programs and constituted a substantial portion of the faculties of these schools.” The four assumptions they based their research on and took with them were:

1. Library science is a genuine, albeit young, natural science....the methodological procedures of natural science are applicable to library science.
2. The library (broadly defined) must be viewed as a complex of facts governed by general laws. The discovery of these laws and theories is the principal subject of research.
3. Once the laws and theories are in place, we will be able to explain, predict and control.

4. The library scientist can and should maintain a strict “value-neutrality” in his or her work (Budd 2001b: p. 105).

Among the faculty at GLS was Pierce Butler (1943, p. 2) who, according to Richardson (1992) believed

in an objectively knowable reality which can be reduced... to a set of mathematical formulas, so that the librarian of the future will be able to solve all his problems—including even such things as book selection—by means of a computer and calculator. (p. 136)

Richardson also comments that Butler and his fellow faculty members “valued the collection of facts (emphasizing what, and especially how much rather than why)... They had ultimate faith in technology and that progress will come about” (p. 137).

According to Muddiman (1999) these ideas were further synthesized by Jesse Shera (1903-82) who “viewed the library as a dynamic social institution whose function is both to organise and disseminate knowledge.” Shera seems to have conceived of the librarian “as a specialist or expert in the communication and documentation systems associated with a particular branch, facet or aspect of knowledge, and consequently assumes the dual role of both knowledge systematiser and facilitator.” For Shera this “amounted to a ‘new discipline’ based on ‘social epistemology.’” He seems to have thought that the new discipline of library science “would encompass a study of how knowledge is created, organised and communicated throughout society.” Thus

librarianship would take its place at the centre of the project of modernity: libraries were to be the supreme form of rational social organisation in that they imposed order upon the chaos of human thought and made the resultant knowledge available for the good of mankind.

This kind of thinking seems to continue today in mainstream LIS. For example Gorman (2000) comments, “Collection development and the hiring and care of staff have more of art than science about them, but bibliographic control is the epitome of rationalism and the ‘scientific approach’ in librarianship” (p. 112).

In contrast, postmodern writers suggest that LIS is not a science. For example Atkinson (1992) states,

Most of us envy the status of the natural sciences. Most of us hanker for scientific objectivity, for the clean, reassuring procedures of the scientific method. But librarianship, and especially collection development, has very little to do with science or objectivity. Bibliography always has been a mutable, obscure, ambiguous, messy pursuit, and those of us who practice it must accept that the instruments we create to help us manage our work will necessarily reflect those qualities. (p. 353)

Cornelius (1996) goes so far as to say, “the field of information studies considered broadly is not a science” (p. 130). Even anti-postmodern writer Wisner (2000) comments colourfully, “Too late will we realize that library science, in its own shy way, was always and properly a part of the humanities—which fixes its eyes on eternal things—and that it destroyed itself by trying to become a second-rate science” (p. 30).

While some postmodern writers seem to see LIS as not being a science, others see it as a social science. For example, Dick (1995) comments,

Library and information science tends to assume the key features of the so-called traditional liberal social sciences.... Value neutrality, for example, is a central quality of traditional liberal social science and highly regarded as a professional outlook for librarians. Its staunch support has led to the rejection of “normative” and often prescriptive approaches. (p. 217)

In the same vein, Cornelius (1996) states,

Such work, which is most typically concerned with examinations of the social nature of library of information use, the behavior of library or information workers, and the sociolinguistic problems of catalog use, classification, indexing, and information retrieval, most typically falls within the field of the broadly defined social sciences, and has most frequently attracted the research methods of those sciences. (p. 13)

The notion that LIS is a social science leads to the suggestion that, if LIS “is to maintain itself as a social science then it must be open to general movements in thinking about, and within, the social sciences” (p. 91). In other words, LIS would do well to consciously adopt the postmodern philosophy of contemporary social sciences which no

longer views the social through the scientific paradigm. I agree with this and am attempting to do this in this thesis.

2.2.6. Conclusion

In this part of chapter two I have offered an overview of the main issues explored by library theorists who are interested in postmodern thought. I have included, as a foil, comments made by anti-postmodern library theorists. I think that some of these writers, including Cornelius, Dick, G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford, and Muddiman present their arguments in a way that is persuasive and relatively easy to follow for those beginning to have an interest in postmodern thought.

Others, including Budd (who provides many useful individual quotes), are difficult to follow even by a person with some knowledge of postmodern thought. I find many problems with Budd's writing. Here is an example:

For Betti the way to achieve understanding is through the triadic process that includes the interpreter, the creator of the text and the text itself. In light of the challenge to the importance of the creator (attributed to Gadamer, among others), we have to recognize that Betti's triad speaks to many of the actions that occur in information agencies, especially direct mediation. When a librarian or information specialist tries to mediate between the record and the information seeker, we can readily see the utility of Betti's vision. The librarian must consider both the question and the person asking it. The phenomenon of mediation includes the three aspects. (2001b, p. 277)

This piece of writing raises all sorts of questions: What triad is he talking about? Is it the triad of the creator of the information, the text and seeker? If so how does the librarian fit in? Is the librarian trying to understand the seeker or the writer of the information? Is it the triad of the questioner, the question and creator of the information? Is the creator of the information the librarian? I find this type of writing quite confusing and probably incomplete.

One of the interesting things about postmodern library literature is that there appears to be relatively little critical comment or discussion among its proponents. It

seems that they have banded together against the mainstream LIS writers and dare not admit to any “false starts” or problematic thinking. One of the few examples of criticism that I found is Dick’s (1999) comment that “the recommendation of social epistemology, the rejection of positivism, and its replacement with hermeneutical phenomenology advocated at various times in LIS literature are all problematic” (p. 310). Although Dick does not specify who he is criticizing, one of the writers who makes this recommendation is Budd (1995).

I suggest that the LIS writers who focus on postmodern thought about libraries need to participate in serious dialogue with each other to clarify and develop the ideas that postmodernism can bring to LIS. I think that until this happens we cannot expect the uninitiated to come to an understanding of postmodern thought about libraries through the literature of LIS. Perhaps, a special journal needs to be established to facilitate these discussions in a safe environment on the periphery of mainstream LIS literature.

2.3. A Review of the Literature Related to Rural Public Libraries

As mentioned in chapter one, the amount of literature related directly to rural public libraries is quite limited. I think that this may relate to the fact that the literature about public libraries in general includes literature about rural public libraries. As Shubert (1993) suggests, “There are more significant points of likeness among all public libraries, regardless of size and location, than differences” (p. 3).

The most prolific writer about rural library issues seems to be Bernard Vavrek whose articles appear in a wide variety of library journals. Vavrek has conducted a number of quantitative research studies (Vavrek, 1995b; Vavrek, 2000) over the years and he is seen as a leader by others who are interested in rural libraries. For example, Barron (1995) says that Vavrek has “insightful scholarship and unquestioned

commitment to the profession” (p. 77). Other significant rural library writers seem to include Judith Boyce and Bert Boyce, Steve Cisler, Francine Fialkoff, and Glen Holt.

2.3.1. Deficit Model of Rurality and Rural Libraries

I think it is accurate to say that the general public tends to see rural communities as marginal when compared to urban communities¹³. Similarly, the literature about rural public libraries tends to suggest that rural libraries are marginal when compared to urban public libraries. Theorists about rurality suggest that many people focus on the negative aspects of rurality and describe rurality through, what can be called, a deficit model of rurality¹⁴. Writers using the deficit model focus on the ways in which rural areas are deficient when compared to urban areas.

I think that most people writing about rural libraries tend to use the deficit model in describing the rural communities in which rural libraries exist. For example, Vavrek (1995a) argues that, although many people think of “rural” as encompassing “the good life,” the reality is that “rural America also is a place where people live in discarded cars and buses, where women and children are abused, and where an increasing number live below the poverty line” (p. 36). Drukenbrod (1993) states that “unemployment is high in rural areas... and concomitantly, rural poverty is prevalent” (p. 35). John (1995, p.

¹³ For example, Allen (1998), in his popular book *Dumbth*, which suggests 101 rules for better thinking including “Recognize that you have personal prejudices” (p. 193), “Beware of reacting to labels rather than to specific individuals” (p. 209), “Understand that your perceptions, opinions and beliefs are, to a remarkable degree, determined by your point of view” (p. 225), and “Be aware of the distinction between consistent evidence and conclusive evidence,” (p. 251)) comments, “Although the subject is fraught with controversial overtones, the reality must nevertheless be faced that all over the planet the general intellectual level falls off as one moves from urban to rural areas” (p. 72).

¹⁴ Montgomery (1997) used this concept in the course he taught about rural issues in the Malaspina University College/James Cook University Masters Degree in Rural Studies.

152) and Senkevitch and Wolfram (1995, p. 13) state similar positions. Drukenbrod (1993) also says that rural communities are faced with difficulties related to “distance and isolation along with crumbling or inadequate infrastructure (poorly maintained roads, antiquated phone and telecommunication equipment, for example)” (p. 35). J. I. Boyce and B. R. Boyce (2000) comment, “Libraries seeking to serve the rural poor must understand that transportation is a major problem, telephone service is limited and Internet connection is unlikely.” They also state that for libraries it is more difficult to overcome rural poverty than urban poverty because of the distances involved and lack of connectivity.

2.3.2. Rural Library Deficits

Not only do writers about rural libraries use the deficit model to describe rural communities, they also tend to use a similar deficit model in describing rural libraries. The main rural library deficits mentioned in the literature include inadequate funding, inadequately qualified staff, inadequate connectivity and technology, problems related to distance (such as higher expenses, lack of accessibility and lack of safety) and rural people’s inadequate knowledge about their libraries. The literature also suggests that rural libraries are faced with an additional problem. Even when there appear to be solutions to these deficits, deficits in the rural communities or other deficits in rural libraries themselves seem to make it unlikely that the original problems can be corrected.

2.3.2.1. Inadequate Funding

I think that the most frequently mentioned problem faced by rural libraries is inadequate funding. Holt (1995) comments on the background of funding problems for rural areas:

The problem of low per capita support and relatively low budgets is fundamentally related to the American tradition of local taxation to support local government services. It is also related to the historically low rate of taxes on rural

land, farm equipment, and out buildings. This means that many rural librarians operate as poor cousins. (p. 201)

Bundy (1998) states, “local government in rural, and urban, areas still tends to fund public libraries marginally and as a cost, rather than as a very worthwhile investment in the welfare of the community.” He suggests that the problem is more severe for rural public libraries. Holt (1995) points out that the funding of rural libraries differs between libraries:

Some rural library districts are poor because their districts are poor. Others are poor because their constituencies, who have the means to do so, choose not to support their libraries. Still others have funds because they have won solid tax support from middle-income and business constituencies. And then there are those groups which are in states where some equalization formula serves to provide a solid base of public income that evens out relative wealth and poverty for local library units. In short, there is no one rural library funding problem. (p. 201)

2.3.2.2. Unqualified Staff

Another deficit described in the literature of rural libraries is lack of qualified staff. There seems to be a widely held view in this literature that a library serving a community with a population as low as 1000 to 2500 people should have a librarian with a Masters Degree in Library Science (MLS) on staff. For example, this point is made by Rogers (2000) when he uses a case study to ask library experts whether a very small community needs a professional librarian. The library administrator and library lecturer who respond to his question both reply that a professional librarian is needed despite the fact that it is difficult to attract librarians to small, remote communities.

Not surprisingly, given the problem of inadequate funding mentioned above, it appears that most libraries in small communities do not have professional librarians on staff. For example, Vavrek (2001) points out, “In small and rural libraries, which comprise the majority of U.S. public libraries, the chance of finding a librarian with a professional degree is about one in 15.” Likewise, Fialkoff (2001) notes that of 76

communities in a particular area of Vermont that have a population of 1000-2499, only 15 have librarians with an MLS degree.

This lack of professional librarians is seen to be a serious problem. For example, Vavrek (1995a) states, “the most important factor limiting present and future development of rural and small town information services is lack of academically trained staff persons in America’s libraries” (p. 38). Barron (1995) asks, “How can a staff with such an educational deficit be expected to accomplish all that will be demanded to enable their libraries to go beyond being a warehouse of popular reading materials?” Citing Dowlin (1993, p.36), Barron also asks, “How can we expect them to ‘change from pointers and retrievers to organizers and facilitators’” (p. 79). Writers suggest a number of reasons for the lack of professionally trained staff. Holt (1995) suggests,

The board of trustees of rural libraries have made conscious decisions, first to spend less overall on staff, and, second, to employ less well-trained staff. In other words, rural libraries have maximized books and minimized their institutional ability to offer skilled professional service. (pp. 202-203)

Leary (1991) suggests that professional librarians do not want to live in remote areas of Australia. In New South Wales, staffing problems usually “begin with attracting suitably qualified staff.” She explains, “Few librarians seem to want to abandon the fertile coastal strip for the unknowns of the interior.... The result is that rural libraries have on average just over half the number of staff per capita that metropolitan libraries have.”

Another problem related to retaining librarians in rural areas appears to be poor pay. For example, Leary (1991) comments that once staff are hired it is difficult to retain them because “pay and conditions are generally poorer and the demands of the job greater.” Fialkoff (2001) mentions the poor salaries that many rural librarians

receive. She describes Vivian Miles, a retired rural librarian in Vermont, who “despite the scandalously low pay” had “enormous” commitment to the library.

Another potential problem related to retaining librarians in small libraries is their apparent lack of skill in dealing with the intricacies of rural government. McC (1992) and Goldberg (1998) each tell the stories of librarians who seem to have lost their jobs because they did not deal successfully with small town politics. Barbara Weiss apparently lost her position in a small town in Montana because she opposed a hazardous waste incinerator (McC, 1992). JoAnn Reitman apparently lost her position in a small town in Wisconsin because she tried to strengthen the library board’s authority and the local aldermen did not approve (Goldberg, 1998). Both librarians apparently had previous successful careers in non-rural libraries.

Leary (1991) suggests that the problem of lack of qualified staff in rural libraries could be solved by training. However, because of distance and cost, staff in rural libraries receive less training than people in more populated areas. In other words, although there is a possible solution to underqualified staff in rural libraries, writers about rural libraries suggest it will probably not succeed because of other deficits in rural communities themselves.

2.3.2.3. Lack of Connectivity

Another deficit noted in the literature of rural libraries is lack of connectivity to support digital information resources. Cisler (1995) argues, “Because it is more expensive to build infrastructure in rural areas than in towns, rural libraries have usually lagged behind urban and suburban libraries in their ability to adopt computer and networking technologies” (p. 179). Senkevitch and Wolfram (1995) also suggest that rural libraries have lower levels of digital connectivity and less technology, such as Internet stations, than have other libraries (p. 16). Schneider (1998) comments, “Libraries that are

unconnected or under connected to the Internet are disproportionately rural and small; their obstacles are huge.” In the Benton Foundation Report, *Losing Ground Bit by Bit: Low Income Communities in the Information Age*, Goslee (1998) states that

Internet access is also spread unevenly among libraries, with the greatest disparity between libraries in urban/suburban and rural areas. While 72.3 percent of all public libraries had some type of Internet connection in the spring of 1997, library systems serving populations of 25,000 and above had a better than 90 percent connectivity rate.... Those serving populations of 5,000 or less had a connectivity rate of around 56 percent.

Terwilliger (1999) states, “Perhaps, no libraries are as strongly impacted by these rapid changes [in technology] than the small and rural libraries. Because of small staff and limited budgets Internet connectivity and training can appear overwhelming obstacles.” Oder (1999) reports on a 1998 American Library Association study that found that “rural public libraries still lag behind urban and suburban libraries in possessing an Internet connection and providing public access.”

J. I. Boyce and B. R. Boyce (2000) point out the importance of technology when they state, “Internet access is becoming a very important information resource ...and public libraries are significant providers.” However, Oder (1999) notes that the *1998 National Survey of U.S. Public Library Outlet Internet Connectivity* “concludes that rural public libraries still lag behind urban and suburban public libraries in possessing an Internet connection and providing public access.”

Providing both books and technology is particularly challenging for rural public libraries. Ison (1995) states, “Citizens in rural areas want and need the same opportunities as those in more urban areas.... The challenge of change is to be able to balance the traditional services while providing the information access tools to meet the information needs of today’s clientele” (p. 148). Christenson (1995) suggests that “The demand for this new world of information must be met by small rural libraries at a time

when many are struggling to keep up with the demand for current best-sellers in book format” (p. 68).

2.3.2.4. Problems of Distance

Other problems for rural libraries seem to be related to distance. For example, Leary (1991) states that, “Operating costs are also much higher in rural libraries. These include a higher cost for books because of the distance from publishers and booksellers, the difficulty of ordering books sight unseen and the time lag between ordering a book and receiving it.” He suggests that the combination of high operating costs and low book budgets “has meant that rural libraries are spending on average only two thirds per capita of what metropolitan libraries spend on library materials.” As a result “rural library collections are generally older than those of metropolitan libraries. This translates into a poorer service for the clients of rural libraries through no fault of the libraries themselves.” I find the concept that the libraries are not at fault to be quite intriguing. Leary seems to somehow separate rural libraries from their funding.

Leary (1991) also argues that service delivery in rural public libraries is another problem. “Those clients who live near the library are able to call regularly but out of town members often have difficulty because of the limited operating hours of most rural libraries.” J. I. Boyce and B. R. Boyce (2000) comment,

In population centers, poor people can seek library service at fixed places, and the library can focus on providing services that will bring those with limited means to these places.... when it comes to rural outreach, libraries often are trying to serve a population so dispersed as to make major use of a central facility difficult.

Vavrek (1998) comments on another problem related to distance. Referring to the murder of a library clerk working alone in a small library in West Virginia, he suggests that while public libraries used to be seen as a “safe haven” this is no longer the case because “unfortunate events in public libraries are eroding this image.... In particular,

rural libraries in geographically remote areas need to recognize the opportunities and vulnerabilities of their unique situations.” It seems that for Vavrek, lack of safety can be exacerbated by issues of distance.

J. I. Boyce and b. R. Boyce (1995) suggest a solution to some of the problems related to distance: “If the service area is large enough and the population willing and able to provide tax revenues for the service, rural outreach is feasible and can be very effective” (p. 115). However, they also point out, “The truly rural library will be hard pressed to provide traditional outreach services mechanisms since its budget may not stretch to cover such expense” (p. 114). In other words, once again, the suggested solution is not likely to be effective because of other rural library deficits.

Writers also note that rural people are not well informed about rural libraries. Bundy (1998) points out that “people in rural areas do not understand what libraries can offer and therefore do not make full use of them.” Vavrek (1995b) states that “the one enduring problem is the public’s continuing uncertainty of exactly what is available in the typical library” (p. 25). J. I. Boyce and B. R. Boyce (2000) comment, “The rural poor may be unfamiliar with available services, might not read even a local newspaper, and are often ignorant of local events. They may live far away from any central service point.”

According to Vavrek (1995b) “an active public relations campaign, if not a marketing effort, is very much needed in rural and small public libraries.” However, once again, the solution will probably not work since “Challenging the speedy adoption of marketing efforts is both the insufficient availability of staff members (or volunteers) and an absence of how-to-do-it techniques” (p. 30).

2.3.3 Possible Solutions

The most commonly suggested solution to rural library deficits is cooperation. The literature suggests several different models. For example, some writers suggest that public libraries could overcome lack of funding and lack of professionally trained staff by joining with schools in school housed public libraries (Amey, 1997; Bundy, 1998; Leary, 1991). Bundy argues that school housed public libraries

are usually more appropriate in rural areas with populations of up to 3,000 which may be unable to sustain a professionally staffed standalone public library. There are many rural areas of Australia now served by mobile libraries or small public libraries without professional staff which could be better served by a properly funded and accommodated joint use library employing at least one professional librarian.

J. I. Boyce and B. R. Boyce (2000) suggest cooperating with various community institutions. They describe a parish in Louisiana which provides mini-electronic branches and Internet kiosks which are housed in such places as the sheriff's department, the local health unit, a small museum, a rural hospital and a housing authority office.

Several writers suggest the formation of consortiums to solve the specific problem of lack of connectivity. Cisler (1995) states "the health of public libraries is tied to the communities they serve" therefore public libraries should become "involved in the community networks that are forming in cities and towns all around the country" (p. 185). Schement (1997) states,

Fewer than half of all public libraries are connected to the Internet, and many offer it only for library staff, not patrons. Diverse partners—ranging from government and schools to businesses and groups—must join the effort to fill this gap.

Schneider (1998) comments, "Very few libraries can connect without tremendous external support, such as a consortium that provides connectivity and basic network support services." Terwilliger (1999) describes how three small public libraries in

Michigan are succeeding in becoming connected through networking. Block (2002) describes “how a new Colorado Consortium is using Application Service Provider technology to give the state’s smallest rural libraries their first automation system.”

As mentioned in chapter one, Long (1996) describes the type of library cooperation often called a federated or cooperative system. She defines a system as “an independent library-related entity with an autonomous governing board whose responsibilities include library cooperation and improvement of member libraries.” She states that one of the reasons that cooperative systems were instituted was to improve library services in rural areas. Currently systems provide continuing education, specialized consulting, automation projects, resource sharing. She concludes, “Systems are still in their catalyst role, working with members in new cooperative ventures.”

Generally federated systems seem to be well thought of by those who work in them.

However, one former director, Jim Scheppke states that he believes that overall federated systems

have done more harm than good.... On the whole, public libraries have not been significantly strengthened; economies of scale have not been realized; too many public libraries are still not managed by qualified staff and, as a result, many public libraries will not be able to compete with other emerging information providers in the 21st century.

Scheppke (Long, 1996) suggests, “The real solution is still the same as it was fifty years ago...in rural areas, large, strong well-managed consolidated regional libraries serving multi-county areas.” As mentioned previously, the Vancouver Island Regional Library is an example of such a consolidated regional library.

The literature suggests that cooperation can be difficult. For example Christenson (1995) states, “Partnering with other libraries and information resources in a large geographic area while retaining local support and governance has always been a delicate balancing act for the small public library” (p. 69). Ison (1995) comments “the tradition

of local control and local decision making... challenges cooperative organizations and cooperative decision making” (p. 135). In other words, once again, it seems that the solution may not work because of rural deficits.

2.3.4. Benefits of Rural Libraries

Not all the literature about rural public libraries is written from the deficit model. For example, Ison (1995) argues that

rural residents often think that they will find everything that they want in larger, more metropolitan, libraries. The fact is that resources are often easier to obtain in a rural library. Customer service is more personalized and the local demand for newer material is usually lower. (p. 139)

Christenson (1995) states that rural public libraries provide access to information, “The role of the small library as an access point to the vast world of information is proving to be one of its most important roles” (p. 68). Senkevitch and Wolfram (1995) comment, “Rural residents, like urban dwellers, need timely access to an array of information in order to make decisions that affect their lives and work and to compete successfully in a global marketplace” (p. 13). Holt (1995), in an article about rural libraries, states, “No public library can do everything. But one thing that all modern public libraries have to do is to introduce information technology in their ways of doing business” (p. 204).

The fact that rural public libraries provide public space is also seen in a positive way. Holt (1995) states that the typical female user of a rural library perceives the library as “a familiar and comfortable place” (p. 194). Vavrek (1998) also refers to the positive perception of a rural public library as a meeting place when he comments, “As the only publicly funded facility that is open daily in some small or rural communities, the public library may afford its users their only opportunity to meet each other.” The importance of library buildings is also stressed by Blanchard (1996) and Fuhr (1996)

when they describe the ways that two small rural communities, one in New York and the other in Minnesota, each fundraised almost \$2 million dollars to build new public library buildings.

2.3.5. Conclusion

In this section of chapter two I have provided an overview of the literature related to rural public libraries. Most of the literature seems to be based on a deficit model and offers little hope of improvement.

I think that there is a great deal of hope for rural libraries if they can agree to cooperate with one another. Based on my own experience with the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I suggest that consolidated libraries can overcome many of the problems recognized in the literature. For example, consolidated libraries can make the most of rural libraries' modest funding by taking advantage of economies of scale. Rather than trying to achieve, what I think is, an unrealistic goal of a professionally trained librarian in every small community, consolidated libraries can ensure that qualified staff are involved in all key library functions (such as collection development, reference service, development of technological services, etc.) and that support for small branch libraries is only a phone call or email away. Consolidated systems also appear to have the ability to deal with difficulties of distance because they have the shared resources to provide such services as books by mail or bookmobiles. I know from my own experience that they can also deal with the problems of rural connectivity by pooling resources to hire specialized staff who may be able to develop innovative solutions. Having experienced periods when both the board and staff of the Vancouver Island Regional Library seemed to be fragmented and divided, I do not discount the difficulties involved in cooperation. However, I think the benefits are great and it is worth the effort to find cooperative solutions.

I think that the literature about rural public libraries could benefit from studies done in a postmodern tradition since it might provide new insights both for small isolated rural public libraries and large federated or consolidated systems.

2.4. Conclusion to Chapter Two

This chapter has briefly reviewed the literature related to postmodern philosophical thought about libraries and the literature related to rural public libraries. I suggest that both these literatures are on the periphery of mainstream, modern, urban library literature. Postmodern library theorists have yet to make serious inroads into mainstream library journals and rural library theorists struggle to make sense of marginalized rural public libraries. I think that it is exciting to be working in an area where there is so much potential for change and hope that this thesis will make a small contribution to both areas.

In the next chapter I will describe the methodology used in doing the research for this thesis.

After Chapter Two

I have finished my literature review.

Now it is done, I hope nobody decides to write anything else.

Before Chapter Three

When I decided to pursue this PhD, I knew the research part would mean long drives to interviews, inevitable technical failures, and many hours of typing up transcripts and coding the data. I was ready for that.

The thing I wasn't really ready for was asking people questions. For some reason I had always thought it rude to pry into people's affairs. Asking a lot of questions wasn't something I normally did.

I started out cautiously, question guide in hand, and was astonished to discover that people seemed to want to answer my questions. They wanted to tell me what they thought. They said they enjoyed it.

The drives were long, the technical failures occurred, and the typing and coding went on for months.

But—because my participants had so many stories to tell—doing the research was, well, really a lot of fun.

CHAPTER 3. ONTOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

I recognize that it is customary in a PhD thesis to include a chapter that describes the researcher's methodology. That way readers can determine the level of confidence they will have in the research. Because this thesis uses, what I describe as, a qualitative constructivist approach, it is also appropriate for me to describe my ontological and epistemological positions and the various biases and resources they bring to my project. That is what this chapter is about.

3.2. Ontology and Epistemology

Some theorists offer simplified descriptions of qualitative social science research methods that appear to be helpful to students and novice researchers. For example, six years ago when I first started to learn about qualitative research, I found Creswell's (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Choosing Among Five Traditions* to be very enlightening. The book focuses on biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study as research methodologies. Creswell suggests that, for qualitative social science researchers there is only one ontological and epistemological position. His ontological assumption is that "reality is constructed by individuals involved in the research" and his epistemological assumption is that "researchers interact with those they study" (p. 76).

Having read and thought a lot about postmodernism and research since first reading Creswell, I now find that I disagree with his simplified position. I think it was a useful introduction and would still recommend beginning qualitative researchers to read it. However, I now not only recognize that many other qualitative research traditions are available but I also think his ontological and epistemological positions are over-

simplified. While some people seem to think that all quantitative research is based in positivist thought and all qualitative research is based in non-positivist thought, I have a different perception. I think that it is possible to base both quantitative and qualitative research in either non-positivist or positivist ontologies and epistemologies. I think that the difference between research based in a non-positivist paradigm and research based in the positivist paradigm is not the methodology used but how the truthfulness of the results is perceived.

Kvale (1996) says,

The issue of what is valid knowledge involves the philosophical question of what is truth. Within philosophy, three classical criteria of truth are discerned—correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic utility. The correspondence criterion of truth concerns whether a knowledge statement corresponds to the objective world. The coherence criterion refers to the consistency and internal logic of the statement. The pragmatic criterion relates to the truth of a knowledge statement to its practical consequences. (p. 238)

I suggest that positivist researchers, whether quantitative or qualitative, tend to understand truth in only one way—as knowledge statements corresponding to the objective world. They see the results of their research as reflecting what is “really and truly going on.” For example, I think positivist *quantitative* researchers try to achieve truth that corresponds to the objective world by ensuring their research methodology is valid and reliable and uncontaminated by researcher bias. They assume that if their work is done correctly, their results will be so truthful that they can be applied to other situations. I think positivist *qualitative* researchers try to achieve truth that corresponds to the objective world by employing such triangulation techniques as multiple methodologies, perspectives, and observations (Liebscher, 1998). Although they assume that their results apply only to the situation studied, they also assume that it is possible to correctly analyze what is really going on and they try to present research results that correspond to the objective world.

I suggest that, in contrast, non-positivist researchers, whether they use quantitative or qualitative methods, perceive the results of their research differently from positivist researchers because they see truth differently. They may see truth according to Kvale's (1996) coherence criterion as being logical and consistent or according to his pragmatic criterion as having practical value. For example, a non-positivist *quantitative* researcher, using statistically significant research methods to study people's views about a public library's open hours, might see the finding that 90% of those surveyed think the library should be open on Sunday, not as corresponding to objective reality, but as providing coherent information that can be used pragmatically to revise the schedule. Likewise, a non-positivist *qualitative* researcher, interviewing a few people, might think of people's comments that Sundays would be much more fun if they could go to the library and read stories to their children, not as corresponding to objective reality, but as also providing coherent information that can be used pragmatically to revise the schedule. Below is a table showing these four different research perspectives.

Table 1

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Positivist	Statistically significant Tries to eliminate bias Believes research results correspond to reality Believes results can be applied to other situations	Not statistically significant Tries to eliminate bias Believes research results correspond to reality Believes results cannot be applied to other situations
Non-positivist	Statistically significant Accepts bias Believes research results are coherent and/or pragmatic Believes results cannot be applied to other situations	Not statistically significant Accepts bias Believes research results are coherent and/or pragmatic Believes results cannot be applied to other situations

Theorists, such as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also disagree with Creswell's position. They suggest that "the open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella-like paradigm over the entire project." They comment,

There are multiple interpretive projects, including performance ethnographies; standpoint epistemologies; critical race theory; materialist, feminist ethnographies; projects connected to the British cultural studies and Frankfurt schools; grounded theories of several varieties; multiple strands of ethnomethodology; African American, prophetic, postmodern and neopragmatic Marxism; and American-based critical cultural studies model; and transnational cultural studies projects. (p. xv)

I agree that researchers use different ontological and epistemological approaches to their research and I find Dick's (1999, p. 319) "holistic perspectivism," mentioned in chapter two, to be consistent with Denzin and Lincoln's position. I also think that the methodology used in a research project need not be based in the ontology and epistemology of the same name. I suggest that methodology is simply a process that can be implemented within various ontologies and epistemologies. For example, in this thesis I am using a constructivist ontology and epistemology, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994), and a hermeneutic methodology, as described by Kvale (1996) and Soderberg and Lundman (1999).

Given the wide range of possible epistemologies and ontologies that have been developed over the years, I think that it would be possible to study the Vancouver Island Regional Library from a variety of perspectives. However I think that the perspective taken would influence the question being researched and vice versa. For example, I think it might be interesting to look at the Regional Library from feminist standpoint epistemology to try to understand why, when 95% of the staff are female, equal percentages of men and women occupy senior positions. I think it might also be interesting to look at the Regional Library from a critical race theory perspective to

better understand what First Nations people or new non-English speaking immigrants want from the Library. It might even be interesting to use non-positivist quantitative research to study, for example, the possible impact of the Library on the economy of the area in which it is located. There are many other research approaches that could be applied to the Vancouver Island Regional Library. Suffice to say, that if other questions had been asked, it seems likely that other epistemologies and ontologies could have been used.

3.3. Constructivist Paradigm

As mentioned above, I have chosen to base this research project in constructivist ontological and epistemological positions, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994). These research theorists describe the constructivist ontological position as thinking that “realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible, mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature... and dependent for their form on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions.” They describe the constructivist epistemological position as thinking that “the investigator and the object of investigation” are “interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds.” Based on their ontological and epistemological positions, constructivist researchers seem to think that research can reach, not the “true” state of affairs, but “a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions.” Methodologies used by constructivists seem to be concerned with eliciting and refining social constructions “through interaction between and among investigator and respondents” (p. 111).

I am not certain that I would identify myself as a constructivist as I prefer the more vague term moderate postmodernist. However, I do agree with, what I understand to be, the main features of constructivist thought. For example, I think that individuals

do construct their own understanding and theories of reality. Extreme constructivists, such as Bruner (1986, p. 95) quoted in Schwandt (1994, p.125), assert that “there is no unique ‘real world’ that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language.” I think that the world outside the individual does exist but that we construct our understanding of it as we experience it. No hidden meanings or theories are embedded in the real world waiting to be discovered. We do not discover truth. Instead we construct theories and meanings about “the world outside” based on our personal experiences.

I am not concerned by the common criticism that, because constructivism accepts that different individuals will interpret the same data differently, constructivism necessarily leads to relativism (McLennan, 1992). I think it is useful to consider real life situations where experts observing the same situation construct different interpretations. There are many examples. Judges in the Supreme Court hear the same evidence, yet interpret it differently. Medical doctors observe the same symptoms, yet make different diagnoses. Informed consumers see the same selection of products, yet choose to buy different models. This is not seen as relativism. It is seen simply as making different interpretations.

I also agree with the constructivist view that some mental constructions are better than others. As Kvale (1992) states, “Shotter (1992) thus accepts an epistemic relativity, where all beliefs are socially produced, but he rejects a moral relativity where all beliefs are equally valid.... In a situation where action is demanded, all views are not equally valid” (p. 9). Constructivism’s recognition that some mental constructions are better than others is consistent with its view that mental constructions are subject to continuous revision through dialectical processes in which individuals discuss meanings

and theories with each other and gradually come to new understandings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).

For me, the idea of ongoing dialogue is one of the most important aspects of constructivism. A constructivist approach allows individuals to interact, not arguing about the validity of a particular set of facts, but formulating more informed and sophisticated constructions through dialectical interchanges. I think this concept can also be described using terminology from postmodern thought. For example, sharing mental constructions can be described as developing a shared discourse. Constructing new and different understandings can be described as engaging in discursive shift.

I think that constructivist epistemology and ontology are appropriate for this study because, although they are different from hermeneutic philosophy, they are still compatible with my hermeneutic interpretation of stakeholders' modern and postmodern comments. In my interpretation I do not analyze the comments to try to determine whether or not they reflect reality. I do not try to clarify the basis upon which they were made. I simply accept that each stakeholder's comments reflect a personal, constructed understanding of an issue. I then enter into a sort of dialogue with the comment and construct, through my hermeneutic interpretation, a different and more complex understanding of what the stakeholder said.

I am aware that my constructivist approach may be a problem for readers who are grounded in a strictly positivist paradigm. They will not see my research as having value if they judge it on such positivist research criteria as validity and reliability. I understand this positivist viewpoint and viewed research that way myself until only a few years ago. However, I now think that letting go of positivism and adopting a constructivist ontology and epistemology can allow us to conduct research in different ways and, in so doing, come to new and different understandings that otherwise would

not have been possible. I suggest that letting go of positivism is worth the tremendous mental effort of doing so¹⁵.

3.4. Biases, Resources and Ethical issues

I recognize that in non-positivist research it is appropriate for researchers to acknowledge that their study is value-laden and to report on their own biases. This differs from research based in positivism which assumes that it not only possible, but also necessary, for the researcher to conduct the research in a value neutral, unbiased way. As a moderate postmodern researcher I believe that a neutral approach to research (or to anything else in life) is not achievable. Even though positivist researchers do their best to try to overcome their biases, I suggest that they actually cannot do so. Belief in the possibility of the neutral stance is also one of the basic tenets of public librarianship. I will discuss my views about its impossibility in more detail in chapters five and seven.

3.4.1. Researcher Biases

Like every researcher, I live in a specific context and hold particular beliefs or biases that I have constructed about reality. I think my beliefs change as I adjust to new circumstances and as I adopt, adapt or reject new ideas that come my way. I understand that my beliefs influence my research and also that my research has influenced my beliefs and biases. I think that the beliefs or biases that have had the greatest influence

¹⁵ I think it is interesting that positivist science can provide insights into how we can make that change. In *Understanding the brain: Towards a new learning science* (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2002), it is reported that neuroscientists believe that “plasticity or flexibility of the brain to respond to environmental demands is... starting to lead researchers to better understand the role of synaptogenesis (the formation of new connections among brain cells) in the adult brain. Moreover, long term learning actually modifies the brain physically because it requires the growth of new connections among neurons” (p. 61). I interpret this to mean that learning not to be an unwitting positivist can be accomplished by building new neural connections in the brain.

on my research are related to my newly developed non-positivist postmodern views, my position as Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, and my white, female, middle-class background.

I have already described how I arrived at my current non-positivist postmodern perspective and will not go into detail about it here. Suffice to say that, as a moderate postmodernist, I recognize that there are many ways of understanding the same phenomenon and these understandings are related, at least partially, to one's epistemological and ontological position. In my interpretation of the modern/postmodern themes in chapters five and six and in my questioning of the modern tenets of public librarianship in chapter seven, I find that I am more likely to agree with postmodern views. There is, however, one area where I find it hard to sustain my postmodern approach. As a moderate postmodernist, I am able to accept, on a philosophical level, the notion that all beliefs have some level of validity. However, I find it hard, in practice, to spend taxpayers money to support people's beliefs in, what I think are, silly or harmful theories. For example, I worry that over the years the Regional Library has accumulated 36 different titles about tarot, an ancient art of divination that has been adopted by some new age thinkers. I think my concern relates to my sense of responsibility for spending the taxpayers' money wisely. Am I really serving taxpayers well by spending their money in this way? "Oops! Here I go." I find myself sliding down the "slippery slope" to the modern, positivist notion that the public library is a public good. It seems that despite my declared moderate postmodern position my modern, positivist views are not far below the surface. Perhaps, awareness that it is possible to see reality from both positive and non-positive viewpoints is "as postmodern as I am going to get."

I think my beliefs and biases also reflect my position as Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library and the more than 20 years I have spent working for the Regional Library system in a variety of capacities. For example, I believe strongly in the value of public libraries and in the Vancouver Island Regional Library in particular. I want to ensure that my beloved “VIRL” continues to both be, and be perceived to be, a significant and valuable organization. This means that I have a bias towards wanting to present the Vancouver Island Regional Library in the best possible light. However, as an administrator, it is my responsibility to identify problems and try to improve the Vancouver Island Regional Library. Therefore, even though I want to present the Regional Library in a positive light, I also want to use my research to make improvements. This suggests that I need to identify and discuss some of the stakeholders’ negative perceptions of the Vancouver Island Regional Library. In my earlier literature review about the roles and purposes of public libraries, I came to realize that most public libraries share similar negative aspects. Having realized this, I am now biased toward presenting the Vancouver Island Regional Library’s negative aspects as being typical of all public libraries, in other words, normal. I am also biased toward presenting myself as a competent administrator. I think it would be foolish to conduct research that would make me appear incompetent. Yet, like everyone else, I have weaknesses and not every decision I have made has turned out to be in the best interest of the Library and its stakeholders. In order to appear competent, while at the same time being as true to my research as possible, I am also biased toward presenting myself as an administrator who learns from her mistakes. In addition, as an administrator, I must often chair meetings where staff have different, strongly held views on various issues. While I want to find solutions that will work, I also have a bias toward respectful, problem solving and non-confrontational discussion. I am therefore

biased toward finding new ways to talk about serious library issues. It seems likely that all these biases have influenced my research.

I think that being a 61 year-old, middle-class, white, female also influences my beliefs and biases. I am part of an energetic and successful extended family that includes my parents, husband, siblings, children, grandchildren and in-laws. During my life, I have lived in a number of places, including remote rural communities, mid-sized towns and large cities. As well as having been a librarian in municipal, university, and school library settings, I have had other jobs that allowed me to interact with people whose lifestyles are different from mine. These include stints as a hospital cleaner (where I met immigrant women who were unable to get skilled jobs), a third world development worker (where I met economically disadvantaged people of colour), a manager of a social services center (where I met probationers and troubled teens), an aerobic instructor (where I met fitness professionals and people trying to keep fit), and a newspaper columnist (where I came to know small town newspaper people). I think of myself as broad-minded and not biased toward any particular group. However, although in my life I have spent time with people with lifestyles and backgrounds very different from mine, I have seldom related to them on more than a superficial basis. This narrowness is probably reflected in the people I asked to participate in the study. Although the group includes a number of people from economically deprived remote communities and a First Nations woman, everyone I interviewed is also either a successful entrepreneur or an educated, middle class person like myself.

3.4.2. Researcher Resources

As both an administrator and a researcher, I think I bring an unusual set of resources to my research. These resources could be described as insider knowledge, quantitative research knowledge, reference service knowledge, and knowledge of technology. The

advantage of undertaking a PhD towards the end of my career is that I have had time to try a lot of interesting things.

I think that having been associated with the Vancouver Island Regional Library in various ways for almost thirty years, first as a library user and then in a variety of paid positions, has provided me with wide-ranging insider knowledge. I first became involved with the Regional Library when I was a “stay-at-home mom” of two small children living in a remote, rural community on Vancouver Island. The community had few amenities but it did have a recently opened branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library. The Library was a very important part of my life, providing, not only books to read, but also a place to find out “what was going on” in the community. Later I worked for the library as an on-call clerical worker, an area librarian, a children’s librarian, an assistant director, and now as executive director. From my days as a clerical worker, I know what it is like to work directly with the constant coming and going of people and library materials. From my days as an area and children’s librarian I know what it feels like to be a professional librarian trying to provide excellent service but not being part of the senior decision making team. As an administrator I am aware of the wide range of political, economic, labour relations, and legal issues that affect the Regional Library. Although I do not know nearly everything there is to know about the Regional Library, I think I have a substantial amount of insider knowledge. I think this insider knowledge enables me to look at issues that a non-insider researcher would probably never look at, to ask questions they would not ask, and to interpret the answers within a context that they would not understand. I understand that some research theorists believe that unless one is an insider it is not possible to conduct meaningful research into a group or organization. I tend to think that, although a non-librarian could

do interesting research on the Vancouver Island Regional Library, it would be very different from research conducted by an insider such as myself.

I also think that my background doing positivist quantitative market research for the Vancouver Island Regional Library is a resource because I understand some of the problems of doing quantitative research in the social sciences. When I was doing this research, I was never completely confident in the statistical significance of the findings and often wondered about contradictions within the data. For example, why, when 90% of the respondents said they were satisfied with the Library, did approximately the same number say they were willing to pay for improvements? The fact that I have done quantitative research in my work may give a certain level of credibility to this study because no-one can say I ventured into qualitative research because I didn't know how to do "a real scientific study." I ventured into qualitative research because I think that quantitative research can only offer an approximation of the truth and qualitative research offers an interesting way of achieving a more complex understanding of the way things seem to be.

Another resource I think I bring to my research is my training and skill as a librarian. For example, as a former reference librarian, I know how to search online databases, indexes, and library catalogues for information. Because librarians always cite the source of the information they use to answer reference questions, I am also attuned to keeping a bibliography of the writers I quote. I am also accustomed to trying to organize large amounts of information so that I can easily locate what I want. It appears that all researchers must learn to do these things when they are preparing literature reviews and handling data. As a librarian I think I had a "head start."

Another resource I think I bring to my research is my knowledge of information technology. Although I do not have a strong knowledge of technology, I do use word-

processing, databases, the Internet, and email in my day-to-day work and regularly use other business related software programs such as organization chart software, accounting software, and project management software. For years I have had my own home computer. I found it relatively easy to learn to use research software, such as *Citation* and *QSR NudistVivo*, to help me carry out the technical side of my research.

3.4.3. Ethical Issues

I think that there are a number of ethical issues related to this study. Kvale (1996) suggests that if we keep in mind that “A central aim of social science is to contribute knowledge to ameliorate the human condition and enhance human dignity” (p. 109) we will conduct ethical research. He states that the three ethical aspects of research are “scientific responsibility, relation to subjects, and researcher independence” (p. 118). Kvale seems to base these ethical aspects of research in the “three major philosophical ethical positions: a duty ethics of principles, a utilitarian ethics of consequences, and an ethics of skills” (p. 121). I have tried to keep this advice in mind as I conducted this research project.

3.4.3.1. Scientific Responsibility

I will start by discussing the ethical issue of scientific responsibility. According to Kvale (1996), a significant ethical issue for researchers is their scientific responsibility to “yield knowledge worth knowing that is as controlled and verified as possible” (p. 118). This requirement seems to be based in the “utilitarian position, also termed a teleological position, [which] emphasizes the consequences of an action—an action is judged pragmatically by its effects” (p. 121). I interpret this to mean that I have a responsibility to produce knowledge about the Vancouver Island Regional Library that is worth knowing, because it has pragmatic value, and that meets appropriate standards for validity.

I think that my research meets Kvale's pragmatic criteria for truth or validity in that it will provide new and useful insights that may influence practice. I am using my research to improve my own personal constructions about the Regional Library. As well as sharing these understandings with others, I plan to use them in ways that will benefit the Regional Library and its stakeholders.

I think my research also meets Kvale's criteria for validity. I have tried to adopt a fallibilistic approach to validity. Schwandt (1994) describes fallibilistic validity as recognizing that "one can have good reasons for accepting an account as true or false, yet an account is always fallible" (p. 169). In chapters five and six I will attempt to represent the stakeholders' perceptions about the Vancouver Island Regional Library as accurately as possible but I accept the fact that it is possible my interpretation is fallible or not completely accurate.

3.4.3.2. Relation to Subjects

According to Kvale (1996), the second ethical aspect of research is "relation to subjects." Researchers may relate to the subjects of the research as "exploiter, reformer, advocate and friend" (p. 118). This requirement seems to be based in the ethics of skills where

ethical behavior is seen less as the application of general principles and rules, than as the researcher internalizing moral values. The personal integrity of the researcher, the interactions with the community studied, and the relation to their ethical values is essential. (p. 122)

In every aspect of the research I have tried, and continue to try, to ensure that no harm comes to my participants.

To start with, I have tried to treat all the people I interviewed as participants in the research rather than as subjects of the research. I saw the interviews more as interesting problem solving discussions than as ways of finding out participants' secret thoughts.

I also tried to maintain and am maintaining strict confidentiality about who participated and who said what. For example, I gave all participants pseudonyms in any written documentation¹⁶. I made sure that I did not tell anyone who had participated unless they were helping me with the arrangements or were part of a focus group. I have not discussed the content of the interviews with anyone in anything but the most general terms. I have not taken action on any of the information obtained through the interviews and focus groups. For example, some participants told me about ways they circumvented Regional Library policies and procedures. I took no action as a result.

I also made sure that I did not include any comments in transcripts that stakeholders asked me to leave out. For example, during one interview, a stakeholder told me about an organization she belonged to. She asked me not to include her comments about it because she didn't want members of the organization to know what she thought about them. Even though what she had said would have illuminated one of the modern/postmodern themes and I thought it unlikely that anyone in the organization would read this thesis, I deleted the comments from the transcript. This may seem to conflict with my ethical scientific responsibility but I think it is more important to protect her from possible harm than to include everything she said.

In my interviews and interpretation I did not disagree with what I think are inaccurate comments about the Regional Library. This was because, as a researcher, I am responsible for hearing what participants think not judging their accuracy. For example, one of the branch heads from a rural library commented,

¹⁶ I selected the pseudonyms for the staff based on when I received their completed questionnaire. For example, I named the first librarian to send in their questionnaire Alice and the first branch head Amy. Where I could not identify the actual person from the staff questionnaire, I used a male name. This was to protect the identity of the one male branch head who was on staff at the time. I selected the pseudonyms for board members and customers randomly.

“I would like more open hours in small, remote branches. Costs for rent, heat, light, phone, etc. are constant, whether the branch is open 2 days or 6. It’s relatively cheap to make our services available to rural customers on schedules more like their urban counterparts¹⁷.”

From my position as Executive Director, I disagree. Each weekly hour of clerical work per year costs the Library approximately \$850 in wages. This means that to increase a “one person branch” from 20 open hours per week to 30 open hours per week would cost \$8500. This is equivalent to the cost of one year’s rent, heat and light for the branch. Not correcting, what I think are inaccuracies, may seem to be in conflict with my ethical scientific responsibility but is consistent with my moderate postmodern approach.

I think that, because I was sensitive to my relationship with my research participants, they were quite open with me. Before I began to do my research, I was concerned that my position in the organization might make staff reluctant to participate in the project. I was also worried that, rather than speaking freely and openly, they might give me the answers they thought I wanted to hear. I assume that both these things happened to a minor degree but I do not think they were a significant problem. For example, as mentioned above, quite a number of staff told me that they disagreed with certain official library policies and procedures, even mentioning the ways they were able to circumvent them. As one branch head told me,

“In my position as a non-trained person, who fell into my job as I did, I had some trepidation about how I would be treated as an employee. That fear has dissipated now that I realize I’m stuck so far out on an island that nobody is going to come here to check up on me and I’ll just sort of keep the circulation up.”

¹⁷ To draw attention to the stakeholders’ comments and differentiate them from quotations from the literature I indent them the same number of spaces that I indent quotations from the literature and enclose them in quotation marks regardless of length of the statement.

3.4.3.3. Researcher Independence

According to Kvale (1996), the third ethical issue for researchers is researcher independence. He states, “Interviewers may so closely identify with their subjects that they do not maintain a professional distance, but instead report and interpret everything from their subjects’ perspectives” (p. 118). This requirement seems to be based on “the duty ethics of principles, also termed a deontological and an intentional position, [which] judges an action independently of its consequences. Moral actions are those that live up to principles such as honesty, justice, and respect for the person” (p. 121). I interpret this to mean that I should ensure, as much as possible, that my relationship to the Vancouver Island Regional Library does not lead me to ignore uncomplimentary comments and emphasize complimentary ones. All viewpoints need to be represented.

I think I should point out, here, that I am not including every comment made by the stakeholders in this thesis. This is not because I want to hide negative comments about the Library, but because I want to focus on stakeholders’ comments that indicate they have a modern or postmodern perspective on an issue. I am not including anything, whether complimentary or uncomplimentary, that does not seem to reflect either a modern or postmodern perspective.

In chapters five, six, and seven, I muse on a number of areas where I think the Regional Library could change its approach by paying attention to insights offered by postmodern thought. I see these musings, not as a criticism of the Regional Library, but as a new way of understanding it. What I am trying to say is that I think the complimentary or uncomplimentary nature of stakeholders’ comments about the Regional Library is irrelevant in this sort of thesis. However, I think that anyone reading this research should be aware that a tension exists between my acknowledged bias about presenting the Regional Library as “a significant and valuable organization” or, at least

as “a library facing typical library problems,” and my ethical requirement for researcher independence.

3.5. Data Gathering

The steps I took to gather my data include identifying who the stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library are, obtaining permission to do research from the gatekeeper, inviting staff to participate, developing the staff questionnaire, inviting board members and customers to participate, developing the interview questions based on the conceptual framework, holding interview and focus group sessions, and transcribing the taped interviews and focus groups.

3.5.1. Stakeholders

The stakeholders in this study are people who have some kind of “stake” or special interest in the Vancouver Island Regional Library. In other words, they are people whose lives are affected in some way by the Library. Various research theorists, such as Stake (1978) and Greene (1994, 2000), have written about the importance of including stakeholders in program evaluation processes (1994, p. 538). Although this study is not a program evaluation, Stake’s and Greene’s meaning of the term stakeholder is useful because it suggests the types of people who can be thought of as stakeholders for the purpose of this study.

Greene (2000) suggests that

In all evaluation contexts, there are multiple, often competing potential audiences for evaluation—groups and individuals who have vested interests in the program being evaluated.... These range from the powerful to the powerless, from policy makers and funders... to program administrators... and program staff members... to advocates and the citizenry at large. (p. 982)

These people are called stakeholders “in evaluation jargon” (p. 982).

The Vancouver Island Regional Library can be seen to have the equivalent of all these types of program evaluation stakeholders. The board members appear to be equivalent to the “policy makers and funders.” The library staff, including branch heads and librarians, appear to be equivalent to the “program staff members.” The library’s users, or customers as we call them, appear to be equivalent to the “advocates and the citizenry at large.” Each of the Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders appears to have their own special or vested interest in the Regional Library.

The board members are elected local politicians who represent their geo-political area on the Regional Library Board. I think that the board members’ special interest is in ensuring that the citizens who elect them receive adequate library service and that the property taxes that support the library are kept at, what they perceive to be, a reasonable level. Many board members do not actually use the services of the Library themselves but they seem to recognize that the Library is a traditional community service and most of them spend considerable time and energy carrying out their policy-making and funding responsibilities.

The branch heads are clerical supervisors of branch libraries. They generally have little or no formal library training but have learned about libraries through on the job experience. The librarians have Undergraduate Degrees and Masters Degrees (or equivalent) in the study of library and information science. I think that both groups’ special interest includes ensuring that their work is fulfilling and well compensated. Being able to meet customers’ stated needs seems to be part of what makes staff’s work fulfilling. For the librarians, fulfilling work also seems to include ensuring that the library follows approved professional practice.

The customers are people who use the library. They may use the library as frequently as every day or just once every few years. They seem to use the library primarily for

1. Bringing their children to special children's programs
2. Borrowing library materials for entertainment, lifelong learning, or self help
3. Spending time in a comfortable environment
4. Using the library's public Internet access computers
5. Finding answers to questions.

I think that customers' special interest includes ensuring that they are able to get the particular types of service they want from the library for themselves and their children.

There is one other stakeholder type that I have not yet mentioned. That is the "program administrator." As Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library I appear to be the equivalent of Greene's "program administrator" and thus can also be seen as one of the stakeholders. I believe my special interest in the Regional Library includes ensuring that the interests of the other three stakeholder groups are met wherever possible. I also see myself sharing the staff's interest in having work that is fulfilling and well compensated. However, as will become apparent in chapter seven, I do not share the librarians' desire to ensure that the Library always follows approved professional practice. Even before I began this thesis, I was more interested in pragmatic solutions than in perfect adherence to, what I have come to see, as the modern positivist tenets of public librarianship.

The research for this thesis was done using, what I suggest is, a fairly straightforward qualitative methodology. I used mailed questionnaires, focus groups and interviews to try to understand stakeholders' views on many different issues. Or, to put it more simply, I used three types of interviews: written interviews, group interviews

and one-on-one interviews to understand stakeholders' modern and postmodern perceptions about issues related to the Vancouver Island Regional Library.

3.5.2. Permission to do Research

One of the key issues related to doing qualitative research is obtaining entrée into the organization or group that a researcher wishes to study (Wolcott, 1994, p. 398). Since I was employed by the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I already had access to the library, its staff and board members. Nonetheless I required official permission from a *gatekeeper* to change my role from administrator to researcher. I identified the gatekeeper as being the chair of the Library Board. Before I began the research phase of my thesis, I explained my proposed project, its purpose and proposed methodology, to the 2001 Vancouver Island Regional Library Board Chair, Jack Peake. Chair Peake gave me written permission to proceed.

The only condition set by Chair Peake was that I would not use library resources (including library email, phone, postal and delivery systems; my own work time; library paper, computers, printers, photocopiers, etc.) to carry out my research. I suggest that this was a significant decision and it affected my research in a number of ways, most of them positive.

When I started this project, conducting my research using only my own resources seemed much less convenient than if I had been permitted to use library resources. For example, if I had been permitted to arrange staff focus groups through library email or fax, it would have saved me time and the cost would have been less than the cost of mailing letters or calling long distance from home. I know of other researchers who are permitted to use their organizations' resources, including work time, to further their research and there were times when I wished that had been the case for me. However, I now think that keeping my research separate from my work was a good decision for me.

For example, taking full responsibility for my research and doing all my research outside my work environment seemed to make my research more credible to the staff and board members who became involved in it. I think they saw I was not abusing my position as chief administrator. Doing my research on my own time and using my own resources also seemed to give me more researcher independence than would otherwise have been possible. It allowed me to come to, what some may consider, quite radical conclusions about the Library and public librarianship in general. Even though I think I have an ethical responsibility not to harm the Regional Library, this thesis is my own opinion and ultimately does not reflect the views of the Vancouver Island Regional Library staff or board. Also, being fully responsible for the research clarified who owns the results. Although this study may be of benefit to the Vancouver Island Regional Library, it is not the Regional Library's intellectual property.

3.5.3. Invitation to Staff and Staff Questionnaire

At the end of April, 2001, I sent letters of invitation with informed consent forms to 28 professional librarians and 37 clerical branch heads. I wanted to invite the professional librarians to be part of my research because, having graduate degrees in library and information science, I considered them to be "experts," not only in understanding the Vancouver Island Regional Library, but also in understanding public libraries in general. I wanted to invite the branch heads, most of whom do not have specialized library training, to be part of my research because they are "expert" in their own local branch and in the community it serves. I was delighted that 19 librarians and 29 branch heads signed the informed consent forms and returned them to me.

I sent the staff who responded a copy of my staff questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of two parts. The first was a table of 36 positive and negative perceptions of public libraries which I had found in my 2000 review of the literature about the role

and purpose of public libraries, mentioned in the prologue. I invited the people to whom I had sent the questionnaire to tell me what portion of the general public they thought see the Vancouver Island Regional Library in ways similar to the perceptions listed. I did not intend to use the data from this part of the questionnaire in my study. I included it to introduce participants to different ways of looking at the Regional Library. I hoped it would free them to answer the open-ended questions on the questionnaire in ways that staff members are not normally encouraged to think. The second part of the questionnaire was made up of five open-ended questions related to what they valued about the library, what they would like to see change, how they thought the library contributed to their community, and changes they had seen in public libraries over the past ten years. I also asked if they had any questions and requested that they indicate whether or not they were prepared to be part of a staff focus group. The questionnaire appears in Appendix A.

A total of 16 librarians and 21 branch heads completed and returned the questionnaires. Of those, 10 librarians and 12 branch heads agreed to be part of focus groups. Several wished me good luck. Eventually, I was able to arrange focus groups that included four librarians and seven branch heads.

3.5.4. Invitation to Board Members and Customers

I invited three board members, with whom I had worked closely, to participate in my research. They all agreed to meet with me individually for an interview. Like many Vancouver Island Regional Library board members, the board members who participated in this study said that they did not actually use the Regional Library. They all said that they spent a great deal of time reading materials related to their positions as local politicians and they all said that they enjoyed recreational reading when they had

time to do it. They also all said that they thought that the Regional Library was a useful community service.

I identified customers to participate in my research with the help of participating staff members and from people I already knew. I interviewed a total of four married couples and two individual women. All the customers I interviewed said they considered themselves to be library users, even though they appeared to use the library with varied degrees of frequency and for different purposes. For example, one customer said she used the library at least once a week and was a voracious reader of light fiction. Another said she used the library approximately every three weeks to borrow fiction for herself and information for her children's school assignments. Two customers said they used the library only every few years and mainly for seeking information.

3.5.5. Developing the Interview Questions

Although, when I was preparing for my interviews, the wording of my research question was not finalized, I knew that I wanted to ask questions that would elicit ideas related to modern and postmodern views of the Vancouver Island Regional Library. I had developed a number of, what I called, modern/postmodern themes that seemed to be becoming part of my conceptual framework. These themes were modern and postmodern perspectives on issues that social theorists suggest may offer new ways of understanding the social sciences. For each of the themes, I had identified a related library issue. In other words, I had identified a library issue where differences of opinion might be understood as expressions of either modern or postmodern perspectives.

For example, one of the first modern/postmodern themes that caught my attention was the theme I call "high and low culture." To put it briefly, the modern view of culture is that there is a high culture which is more worthy and valuable than low

culture. In other words, from the modern perspective the *Mona Lisa* is a very important piece of high culture while the art work in comic books has little or no cultural value. In contrast, a postmodern view is that all expressions of culture are valid and worthy of recognition. In other words, there is no difference between the famous works of art displayed in a great art gallery and the comic books sold in a nearby convenience store. The only reason we think there is a difference is because we privilege the views of the dominant group (male, white, heterosexual, humanist, adult) that sees the *Mona Lisa* as important and comic books as trash. Modernists, including marginalized people, have adopted the dominant group's view of culture rather than accepting that the cultures of groups that have been marginalized (female, people of colour, gay, non-humanist, youth) are also of value.

A library issue that seems to be related to this modern/postmodern theme is the question of what should and should not be included in the Regional Library's collection. In other words, the question "Should the library only provide 'the best' books and materials available or should the library provide popular materials that people want to read?" seems to be related to the modern/postmodern theme high and low culture. I thought that the view that the library should focus most of its resources on the Canon, such as the works of Shakespeare and Atwood, would be an example of the modern perspective. I thought the idea that the library should spend its resources both on the works of Shakespeare and Atwood and pulp fiction or graphic novels would be an example of a postmodern perspective.

Based on my reading of the work of social theorists who suggest that postmodern thought has value for the social sciences and my own experience in the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I identified 37 library issues that I thought could be seen to be related to 37 modern/postmodern themes. I developed questions related to each of these

issues and themes and asked stakeholders their opinions about them. However, when I came to write up my interpretation of my research I realized that I could not include all 37 themes due to space constraints. I decided to focus on the 20 themes and issues that seemed most compelling.

Below is an excerpt from the interview guide I used when talking about the Regional Library in terms of high and low culture. I introduced the question by referring to the responses to the written staff questionnaire. I also designed a number of sub-questions for each question to encourage discussion. The full question guide for high and low culture, with all the sub-questions, appears below.

Question Guide Regarding High and Low Culture

“In responding to the questionnaire, several staff commented that VIRL provides ‘good books’ and ‘a first rate book collection.’

1. What do you think staff might have meant by ‘first rate book collection’? What would it include? Examples? Why? What would it not include? Examples? Why?
2. What would the binary partner of first rate book collection be (expect second rate book collection)
3. What would a second rate collection include? Examples? Why?
4. Some people talk about high culture and low high culture (another binary). What do you think they mean by those terms? What might be examples of high culture?
5. Is opera high culture? Do you have to learn how to appreciate high culture? Is high culture better?
6. What might be examples of low culture? Is a rave low culture? What do you think people who put on raves would think about this?
7. Do you think the difference is important? Why?

8. How might the concept of high and low culture relate to the concept of a first rate collection?
9. Do you think libraries are an example of high culture? Why?
10. Do you think they are examples of low culture? Could you say something more about that?
11. Who do you think should decide whether libraries should appeal to everyone or just have the high culture type stuff? What makes you think that?
12. What do you think might be the characteristics of the high culture library materials? Any more ideas?
13. How might differences of taste affect whether or not something is considered high or low culture?
14. Can you see how this might affect what libraries provide for teens?"

I think it is apparent that the questions I asked were quite direct. I think they clearly indicate what I wanted to talk about and why. In the actual focus group or interview situation, I did not use most of the sub-questions. They were simply a backup in case the discussion faltered.

I created a similar question guide for each modern/postmodern theme and its related library issue. I used all the questions but, to ensure that the interview or focus group sessions did not exceed 90 minutes, I did not ask any individual or focus group all the questions. The entire set of question guides, minus the sub-questions, appears in Appendix B.

3.5.6. Interview and Focus Group Sessions

I held a total of 12 interviews and focus group sessions. I tried to make sure that the participants were comfortable and at ease by providing refreshments or taking them out to a restaurant for a meal before or after the session. I held the sessions in a number of

different places, including a seminar room at two different Malaspina University College campuses, a hotel meeting room, a business office, my own living room, a friend's living room, and an office in a branch library during closed hours.

Before each session I asked the stakeholders to sign an informed consent form. I began by explaining the purpose of my research. I pointed out that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions I was asking. I stressed that participants did not have to answer questions if they preferred not to and that they could stop the interview at any time. I pointed out that I was tape recording the session and would transcribe it, edit it to make it read smoothly, and then send it to them for their final approval. I also promised complete confidentiality.

I enjoyed each session and all the participants said that they found the experience interesting and enjoyable. Some said that they had never before thought about the Library in the ways elicited by the questions.

3.5.7. Transcription

I taped each session and transcribed it later. I had two significant problems with my tape recording equipment. During the first Librarian Focus Group, the batteries died and I lost the last half-hour of the session. I did not try to reconstruct the information because the participants agreed to meet again at a later date. After that, I bought a second tape recorder and microphone. Unfortunately I had a problem with my interview with Marlene because I did not realize that one tape recorder was turned to pause and the other microphone was turned to off. I discovered the error shortly after completing the interview and immediately wrote up what had been said from memory based on the interview guide. As with all my transcripts I sent to Marlene for her approval.

I personally transcribed all the tapes. Although it took a long time, it gave me the opportunity to review what had been said and to note some of the nuances that a

secretarial transcriber might not have noticed. I was also able to “clean-up” the transcripts so that they read smoothly. I sent the “cleaned-up transcripts” to the participants for approval. I offered to change, not only the parts of the transcript that they thought were an inaccurate representation of what had been said, but also parts about which they might have changed their minds. This was because I wanted to record only the ideas they believed were worthwhile, not to trick them into revealing what they “really” thought. No-one said they had changed their minds. However, one person asked me to omit a section. When they requested changes be made, I made them exactly as asked.

3.5.8. Summary of Sessions

In all, I held a total of 12 sessions and talked to a total of 24 different participants. The following table outlines the key facts about the interviews and focus groups:

**Table 2.
Interviews and Focus Groups**

TYPE OF GROUP	TYPE OF SESSION	DATE	NAMES	HOME	LOCATION OF SESSION
Librarian	Focus Group	19/07/01	Alice, Beth, Katie, Isabel	Nanaimo	Malaspina Seminar Room, Nanaimo
Branch Head	Focus Group	24/07/01	Eleanor, Flo, Helen, Quentir	South Island	Malaspina Seminar Room, Nanaimo
Branch Head	Focus Group	26/07/01	Amy, Deidre, Nancy	North Island	Coast Discovery Hotel, Campbell River
Librarian	Focus Group Follow-up	13/09/01	Same librarians	Nanaimo	Malaspina Seminar Room, Nanaimo
Board Member	Interview	20/10/01	Denise	North Island	Malaspina Seminar Room, Nanaimo
Board Member	Interview	27/10/01	Paul	South Island	Business Office, near Victoria
Board Member	Interview	03/11/01	John	Central Island	Malaspina Seminar Room, Duncan
Customer	Focus Group	26/12/01	Bert, Jessica, Evelyn, Gordon	Nanaimo	Home Living Room, Nanaimo
Customer	Interview	27/12/01	Marlene	North Island	Friend's Living Room, Nanaimo
Customer	Focus Group	19/01/02	Len, Jill	North Island	Library Office, Courtenay
Customer	Interview	25/01/02	Margaret	North Island	Home Living Room, Nanaimo
Customer	Focus Group	23/02/02	Lou, Bonnie	Nanaimo	Home Living Room, Nanaimo

3.6. Hermeneutic Interpretation

I understand hermeneutic interpretation to be a research methodology that is used to come to new understandings of texts, works of art, human utterances and actions, and so on, through cycles of interpretation. Hermeneutic interpretation appears to have originated in the nineteenth century as a way of interpreting classical, legal and biblical texts. Today it is used by qualitative researchers.

Although I do not base my understanding of hermeneutic interpretation on hermeneutics as a philosophical position, I think it is appropriate to recognize that hermeneutics is seen as a significant contemporary philosophy. According to Schwandt (1997), a number of philosophers including Derrida, Dilthey, Foucault, Gadamer, Habermas, Heidegger, and Ricoeur, have taken different approaches to hermeneutics as

a philosophy. For example, Heidegger and Gadamer developed what has become known as a hermeneutics of trust “because it reflects the belief that meaning or truth will be found through interpretation modeled on dialogue and conversation” (p. 116). In contrast Derrida and Foucault developed what has become known as a hermeneutics of suspicion because “it argues that all interpretations are false and there is no escape from false consciousness.” Habermas falls somewhere in between in that he seeks to “unmask false consciousness” but also trusts in “language and dialogue and holds out hope for the restoration of meaning and institutions” (p. 65). My use of hermeneutics as a research methodology is probably related most closely to Habermas’s philosophy since I am trying to unmask the positivist view of public libraries and I am searching for ways to restore understanding of, at least, one particular public library.

According to Kvale (1996), there are seven canons on hermeneutic interpretation.

They include

1. The continuous back and forth process between the parts and the whole that follows from the hermeneutical circle
2. An interpretation of meaning ends when one has reached a “good Gestalt” and inner unity of the text free of logical contradictions
3. The testing of part interpretations against the global meaning of the text
4. The autonomy of the text
5. Knowledge about the theme of the text
6. An interpretation of a text is not presuppositionless
7. Every interpretation involves innovation and creativity (pp. 48-49).

I interpret these hermeneutic canons to mean that a hermeneutic researcher, using presuppositions and knowledge of underlying themes, begins by interpreting individual comments in a transcript, moves to a broader interpretation, and then back to the

individual comments, to add new ideas to the interpretation. This hermeneutic circle is repeated until the interpreter reaches a satisfying, innovative, creative interpretation. The researcher may use this interpretation as a base from which to engage in another cycle of hermeneutic interpretation from which another interpretation is developed. Because researchers come with their own individual presuppositions and because they may identify different themes as being important, different researchers will almost certainly reach different interpretations. This is not a weakness as it would be in quantitative research where it is expected that the same research method will yield the same reliable information. Instead it indicates what Kvale (1996) calls “a richness and a strength of interview research” (p. 212).

Researchers have developed different methodologies for actually carrying out hermeneutic interpretation. I interpreted the transcripts by loosely following the methodology developed by Soderburg and Lundman (1999), researchers in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Tromsøe in Norway. This methodology had been recommended to me by Tom Tiller (2000), a rural researcher from University of Tromsøe whom I had met at the 2000 Rural Conference at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo.

Soderberg and Lundman’s (1999) methodology is inspired by Ricoeur (1976). It begins with taping and then word-processing what was said during the semi-structured interviews to produce a text to be studied. Their analysis includes three phases:

1. The first phase is naïve reading to acquire a sense of the whole text.
2. The second phase is structural analysis to find themes and sub-themes.
3. The final phase is an interpretation of the text as a whole by combining the naïve reading, the structural analysis and the author’s pre-understanding to reach a comprehensive understanding.

This movement from large to small and back to large again is known as the hermeneutic circle. It is a cycle that can be repeated many times until one reaches, what Kvale (1996) calls “‘good Gestalt’ or an inner unity of the text free of logical contradictions” (p. 48).

I tend to agree with Janesick’s (2000) warning about the dangers of “methodolatry” which she defines as a “slavish attachment and devotion to method” (p. 215) and so made Soderberg and Lundman’s (1999) hermeneutic methods work for my question. I conducted two hermeneutic cycles using the results of the interviews and focus groups, ideas from the literature and my own pre-understandings.

3.6.1. First Cycle

My first hermeneutic cycle moved from the interview and focus group transcripts to my musings about the modern/postmodern themes and related library issues.

I carried out the first phase (naïve reading) by re-reading the transcripts after I had made the final revisions. By that time I had become very familiar with the transcripts because:

1. I had been involved in the initial interview or focus group.
2. I had transcribed the tapes.
3. I had “cleaned-up” the transcripts to make them flow smoothly.
4. I had made any final corrections requested by participants.

I carried out the second phase (structural analysis) by coding the transcripts using the software package *QSR NudistVivo*. I read through the transcripts and divided the text up into meaning units that varied in length from a single sentence, to a paragraph or more. In some cases the relevant data was a direct answer to a question I had asked. In others cases, the relevant data emerged in the course of discussing other questions. As I decided upon the meaning units, I also created the codes (or nodes, as *QSR NudistVivo* refers to them) which I thought they were related to. At first I coded all the data

regardless of whether or not it had any relevance for the thesis question. Gradually I began to realize that this thorough approach was not helping to advance my research. I revised the node structure to reflect only modern and postmodern interpretations of the (at that point) 37 themes and related library issues. I then coded the data that reflected those themes and issues.

Once I had completed the basic coding, I wrote memos interpreting what I thought the stakeholders were saying about each modern/postmodern theme and related library issue. From that I began to build the individual sections of chapters five and six. I used chapter five to focus on the modern/postmodern epistemological themes and chapter six to focus on the modern/postmodern themes related to the postmodern social condition. As my interpretation proceeded it became evident that I could not include all 37 themes within the 100,000 word limit set for a thesis. I eventually reduced the number to 20.

I carried out the third phase (interpreting the text as a whole by combining the naïve reading, the structural analysis, ideas from the literature and the researcher's pre-understandings to reach a comprehensive understanding) by musing about ideas evoked by the stakeholders' comments, the ideas from the literature, and my own pre-understandings of the Regional Library.

3.6.2. Second Cycle

The second hermeneutic cycle moved from my interpretation of the 20 modern/postmodern themes to a new level of synthesis in chapter seven. The first phase in this cycle was to re-read chapters five and six to gain a general understanding of those chapters. The next phase was to divide the text into new meaning units that focused on aspects of the Regional Library including library services, cataloguing and display, the collection, the Library as a workplace and planning for the future. The final step was to synthesize these ideas with new ideas from the literature and my own

developing pre-understandings to create a new understanding. As I was working on this cycle, the idea that many of the traditional modern, positivist tenets of public librarianship should be questioned began to emerge. I also began to see a number of “pragmatic strategies” that might be used to replace the modern, positivist tenets.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology used in this thesis. In it I attempted to describe my ontological and epistemological positions; my biases, resources and ethical issues; and the way I gathered and interpreted data. In the next chapter I will describe the conceptual framework upon which this thesis is based.

After Chapter Three

I have to admit it – this is my story. My story, embellished with the stakeholders intriguing remarks. But – isn't it always?

Before Chapter Four

When I began writing chapter four, I did not understand what people meant when they talked about “a conceptual framework.”

At first I thought my modern/postmodern themes were the framework. Then I decided I needed something that would tie them together.

Oh—that seemed to be it—a framework to tie the concepts together—a conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the conceptual framework I am using in this thesis. The conceptual framework is the underlying mental construct that ensures that the thesis follows a coherent approach. It provides a rationale for drawing conclusions from the data about the research question.

4.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on five main concepts.

1. The first concept is that modernism and postmodernism are substantively different. They are based on different epistemologies and they play out differently within contemporary social conditions.
2. The second concept is that it is possible to identify within the literature of postmodern social theorists, matters where modern and postmodern perspectives are clearly different. I call these matters modern/postmodern themes.
3. The third concept is that the differences between modern and postmodern perspectives are identifiable. If we are aware of the differences between modernism and postmodernism, we can identify people's modern or postmodern perspectives by interpreting what they say and write.
4. The fourth concept is that, by interpreting hermeneutically comments that have been identified as being modern or postmodern, we can develop a different way of understanding institutions, including the Vancouver Island Regional Library.
5. The fifth concept is that, from this hermeneutic interpretation, we may be able to develop new insights and pragmatic strategies, some of which might not otherwise have come to mind.

4.2.1. Difference between Modernism and Postmodernism

The first concept in the conceptual framework is that there are substantive differences between modernism and postmodernism. In other words, modern and postmodern epistemologies are different and modern and postmodern social conditions are different.

4.2.1.1. Modern and Postmodern Epistemology

Modern and postmodern epistemologies or ways of understanding “what it means to know” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 39) are different from each other. Postmodern social theorists suggest that the modern epistemology is positivism. As I mentioned in the prologue, positivism is a way of thinking that is based on the assumption that:

1. There is a reality.
2. People are distinct from this reality and can know about it.
3. Reality is governed by immutable laws and mechanisms.
4. People can discover the truth about these laws and mechanisms by rigorously following replicable scientific methods of inquiry.
5. Quantifying an issue or situation gives a better understanding of it than simply describing it.
6. Language allows us to accurately express the truths we have discovered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).

As mentioned in chapter two, unwitting adherence to positivist epistemology dominates most of the literature of library and information science (LIS). The underlying positivist paradigm seems to compel writers and readers to search for the correct ways to carry out the business of libraries. Although some positivist library theorists (Gorman, 2000, Zwadlo, 1997) suggest that contemporary library literature focuses on practical issues, I think that there is also a lot of interest in determining the correct way to do such things

as catalogue materials, answer reference questions, implement technology and manage library staff.

Postmodern social theorists seem to agree that there are a number of postmodern epistemologies. The thing that these epistemologies have in common is the fact that they are all non-positivist. Some of these non-positivist postmodern epistemologies are described briefly below:

1. Postpositivism assumes that reality exists but we can only apprehend it imperfectly.
2. Constructivism assumes that realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions which are local and specific in nature and which can be altered as we become more informed. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109)
3. Hermeneutics generally refers to the cyclical interpretation of an object, such as a text, a work of art, human action, utterances, etc. (Schwandt, 1997, p. 62)
4. Phenomenology rejects scientific realism and insists on careful descriptions of the life-world to come to an understanding of the meaning of things.
5. Standpoint epistemologies, one of which is feminist epistemology, are based in the recognized biases of different standpoints.

It may be useful to think of the modern and postmodern epistemological perspectives as two lenses through which we see reality. What we see depends on which lens we use. In both cases we are interpreting the same things, but the underlying epistemologies used to explain “what is going on” are different and therefore what we see is different.

4.2.1.2. Modern and Postmodern Social Conditions

Black and Muddiman (1997) comment,

While theorists of information, culture and infrastructure do not hesitate to make use of wider socio-cultural theory, such as the concept of postmodernity, in order to contextualize and explain their subject, commentators on library issues, mostly librarians and library educators, have generally fought shy of formulating wider theoretical frameworks including the shift from a modern to a postmodern age. (p. 9)

They suggest that, as well as studying public libraries from the perspective of postmodern epistemology, it would be worthwhile studying them in terms of postmodern social, cultural and economic “human behaviours.” They suggest that “the most conspicuous manifestation of *social* [my italics] postmodernity is the emphasis on pluralism...involving the search for social segmentation, fluidity and difference and negation of homogeneity, centralization, bureaucratization, planning and any mass social form whether recreational, political, spiritual, or consumerist.” They describe postmodern *culture* [my italics] as “involving a movement away from standardized, established approaches towards freedom of expression, inversion, and eclecticism.” They describe “postmodernism’s *economic* [my italics] dimension as most commonly conceptualized in the term post-Fordism.” They suggest that, “with the help of information technologies and deregulation of the labour market,” capitalists have begun to implement “new regimes of production characterized by just in time methods, short runs, greater customization and a much increased mobility of capital” (pp. 9-10).

I think that awareness of postmodern social, cultural and economic conditions are apparent in the literature of LIS they are just not labelled as such. While library theorists generally “fight shy” (Black & Muddiman, 1997, p. 9) of using the term postmodern they cannot and do not ignore these changing conditions.

The following table is based on Black and Muddiman’s (1997) description of these three postmodern categories.

Table 3.
Comparison of Modern and Postmodern Behaviours

Modern	Postmodern
Social	Social
Homogeneous, bureaucratic, mass forms of behaviour	Pluralism, social segmentation, fluidity and difference
Cultural	Cultural
Standardized, established	Freedom of expression, eclectic
Economic	Economic
Fordist mass production and mass consumption	Post Fordist regimes characterized by just-in-time, short runs, greater customization

While I think it is interesting to differentiate between the three categories and found Black and Muddiman’s description of them to be quite enlightening, in this thesis I will group all the modern/postmodern themes related to these behaviours into one category, “themes related to postmodern social conditions.”

4.2.2. Modern/Postmodern Themes

The second concept in this conceptual framework is that it is possible to identify within the work of postmodern social theorists certain modern/postmodern themes where the modern and postmodern views about a particular issue are substantively different. As mentioned in chapter three, in preparing to write this thesis I identified a total of 37 themes that I thought could be applied in some way to the Vancouver Island Regional Library. In the interest of brevity I only explore 20 themes in this thesis. The modern and postmodern views of these 20 themes appear in the tables below.

Table 4.
Comparison of Modern and Postmodern Epistemological Themes

	Modern epistemological themes	Postmodern epistemological themes
1	Seeks universal truth	Rejects universal truth
2	Knowledge is privileged	Knowledge is constructed
3	Only scientific truth is valid	All beliefs are valid
4	One can be a neutral observer of the observed	One is always rooted in what one observes
5	Language allows us to describe reality	Language limits what we can think or say
6	Words have intrinsic meaning	Binary pairs affect some words' meanings
7	The author creates the meaning	The reader creates the meaning
8	Boundaries between disciplines	No boundaries between disciplines
9	More information means more knowledge	More information means less meaning
10	Professionals can be trusted	Professionals cannot be trusted
11	Original thoughts are possible	Texts interrelate endlessly

Table 5.
**Comparison of Modern and Postmodern Themes
Related to the Postmodern Social Condition**

	Modern social themes	Postmodern social themes
1	Power is found in institutional structures	Power exists in all relationships
2	People have power	Society can be controlled panoptically
3	There is great evil in the world	Moral panics instil fear
4	The male, liberal, humanist is important	Marginalized people are important
5	All women share the same issues	There is no core gender identity
6	There is a global, hegemonic, superior culture	Culture is pluralistic and ever changing
7	Only science has value	Paranormal beliefs have value
8	All work should be secure	Split between secure and casual workers
9	Bureaucracy does work	Bureaucracy does not work the way we think

4.2.2.1. Modern and Postmodern Views of Metanarratives

One of the key ways in which the modern and postmodern perspective can be seen to differ from each other is in regard to their views about metanarratives or grand theories. Social theorists suggest that from the modern perspective it appears that reality can be understood in terms of metanarratives, logocentrism or grand theories. For example, according to Bertens (1995), Lyotard (1986) suggests that “metanarratives” are “the supposedly transcendent and universal truths that underpin western civilization and that function to give that civilization objective legitimation” (p. 124). According to Seidman (1998), Derrida’s (1976) concept of “logocentrism” is similar to Lyotard’s

“metanarratives” and can be described as Western culture’s “quest for an authoritative language that can reveal truth, moral rightness, and beauty” (p. 221). Foucault’s concept of “general theory” is also related and can be described as “the longing for intellectual foundation and conceptual closure” (p. 234). In other words, it appears that key postmodern thinkers agree that powerful, widely held concepts underlie much of modern thought.

From a postmodern perspective, these grand theories or metanarratives have no value. In fact, postmodernists see such ideas (such as belief in the benefits of progress, the accuracy of science, the ability of language to describe reality, etc.) as being harmful. For example, Foucault talks about “general theory” being “purchased at the cost of social repression” (Seidman, 1998, p. 234). Lyotard (1986) suggests that the emancipatory and scientific grand narratives “created the possibility of total war, totalitarianism, the growing gap between the wealth of the North and the impoverished South” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 128). In fact, Lyotard attempts to sum up postmodernism when he says, “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 128). In other words, a key narrative of postmodern thought is that one should be sceptical about the commonly held theories and stories that seem to underlie modern thought. While, modernists may suggest that Lyotard’s notion about metanarratives is metanarrative in itself and therefore not valid, postmodernists do not seem concerned. I think that if they were to think of Lyotard’s notion as a metanarrative they would likely also be sceptical about it. Postmodernism is like that. It does not seek closure and is accepting of uncertainty and contingency.

When I first became aware of the difference between the modern and postmodern perspectives about metanarratives, I thought that this difference would form the basis for one of the modern/postmodern themes. However, I eventually came to think that

Lyotard's definition of postmodernism "as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Ritzer, 1997, p. 128) was more profound than I had at first taken it to be. I think that in each of the 20 modern/postmodern themes, the modern perspective can be seen as a modern metanarrative and the postmodern perspective can be seen as its sceptical response. For example, when modernists proclaim that "universal truth is out there waiting to be found," postmodernists respond, "I don't think so." When modernists proclaim that "power is found in institutional structures," postmodernists respond, "I don't think so." Likewise when modernists proclaim that "there is a global hegemonic superior culture," postmodernists again respond, "I don't think so." I think this is the case for all the modern/postmodern themes. It is possible that to modernists, some of the modern perspectives explored in this thesis may not seem very "grand" or "meta." However, they all relate to a modern belief that guides action. I suggest that, to a postmodernist, criticism about the lack of grandness of any of the themes would not be relevant. Such a criticism would be based in the modern metanarrative that "some things are more important than others" to which a postmodernist would probably reply, "I don't think so."

4.2.3. Stakeholders' Differences of Opinion are Reflective of Standpoints

The third concept in the conceptual framework is that it is possible to identify modern and postmodern perspectives in what people say. I think this can best be explained by an illustration. As I mentioned in chapter three, some stakeholders said that public libraries should collect and lend only the best books. Others said that public libraries should collect and lend a wide variety of materials to suit every taste. I think that stakeholders who said that public libraries should collect and lend the best books are speaking from the modern perspective which holds that there is such a thing as a high culture which includes the best books. In contrast, stakeholders who said that public libraries should

collect and lend books to suit all tastes and values are probably speaking from a postmodern perspective that holds that all types of culture are of equal worth including pulp fiction and graphic novels. In chapters five and six, I will interpret a wide variety of stakeholders' comments as being reflective of modern or postmodern perspectives.

4.2.4. Hermeneutic Interpretation

The fourth concept in the conceptual framework is the idea that it is possible to understand the meaning of what people say using hermeneutic interpretation.

Hermeneutic interpretation is not a scientific method and makes no claims to validity.

Instead it seeks to provide a deeper and clearer understanding of a belief or practice than can be provided by simple common sense. As Cornelius (1996) points out,

A basic claim of [hermeneutic] interpretation is that some meaning that is unclear can be clarified, that it can be made available in a clearer form that offers a better interpretation than that previously available. A clearer interpretation is one that makes more coherent sense of a particular practice, pulling together more of its history and data than does another interpretation. (p. 26)

I do not view my hermeneutic interpretation of stakeholders' comments as being definitive or giving the final interpretation of what the stakeholders were trying to say. Nor do I think my hermeneutic interpretation deconstructs the stakeholders' comments to provide an understanding of all the biases that may have influenced them to say what they are saying. I also do not think that every reader will understand the stakeholders' comments in the same way that I do. I think that my hermeneutic interpretation simply deconstructs the stakeholders' comments sufficiently to identify whether modern or postmodern thought have influenced their opinion.

The fact that other interpretations are possible does not seem, in my view, to be a flaw in the conceptual framework. Rather, I think that the flexibility and expandability of the conceptual framework is its strength. It could allow other researchers to develop a

complex multi-dimensional web of interesting ideas about the Vancouver Island Regional Library, or indeed, other public libraries or other institutions.

4.2.5. Pragmatic Strategies

The fifth concept in the conceptual framework is that hermeneutic interpretation can evoke new ideas and pragmatic strategies that otherwise might not come to mind. While it appears that most of the literature about postmodernism suggests that it simply critiques modernism and does not inspire action, I think a pragmatic approach based in postmodern thought is appropriate in this thesis. As a library administrator, I am interested in using my research as the possible basis for making changes in the Vancouver Island Regional Library. I ground my approach on Kvale's (1996) concept that "With the emphasis on instigating change, a pragmatic knowledge interest may counteract a tendency of social constructionism to circle around in endless interpretations and a plunge of postmodern analysis into infinite deconstructions" (p. 248).

Therefore, although I do not claim that the pragmatic strategies evoked in chapters five and six and further explored in chapter seven are the correct solutions to library issues identified in this thesis, I do think that they may be useful. I recognize that to modernists my questioning of some of the basic tenets of public librarianship and the pragmatic strategies I suggest may seem outrageous. As a moderate postmodernist, this does not cause me concern. These are only a few ideas that I put forward for readers to consider.

4.3. Social Theorists

The modern/postmodern themes used in this conceptual framework come indirectly from the works of such postmodern writers as Foucault, Baudrillard, Derrida, Lyotard,

Lacan, Virilio, Rorty, Giddens, Beck, Habermas, Bauman, Harvey, Bell, Jameson, Mills, and certain lesser known postmodern feminist writers. Many of these writers did not consider themselves postmodernists. However, postmodern social theorists have labelled them as such, and for the purpose of this thesis, I think of them as “primary postmodern thinkers.”

Rather than developing the themes directly from the work of these primary postmodern thinkers, I base the themes on the work of such social theorists as Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (1991), Hans Bertens (1995), David Dickens and Andrea Fontana (1994), Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (1994), Steinar Kvale (1992), Angela McRobbie (1994), George Ritzer (1997), Pauline Rosenau (1992), Steven Seidman (1998), and Barry Smart (1992) who interpret their work. Each of these social science writers seems to suggest that postmodern thought is of value to the social sciences. For example, sociologist Ritzer states, “What postmodern social theory offers is a storehouse chock full of such ideas.... The infusion of so many new ideas cannot help but invigorate sociology and social theory” (p. xviii). Political scientist Rosenau comments,

The appearance of post-modernism in the humanities and the social sciences signals more than another novel academic paradigm. Rather, a radically new and different cultural movement is coalescing in a broad-gauged re-conceptualization of how we experience and explain the world around us. (p. 4)

Education theorists Aronowitz and Giroux state, “The discourse of postmodernism is worth struggling over.... it is important to mine its contradictory and oppositional insights for possible use in the service of radical cultural politics and a critical theory of pedagogy” (p. 62).

Each of these social theorists develops a structure for organizing the complex and sometimes contradictory ideas of postmodernism so that it is possible for uninitiated

readers to access postmodern ideas relatively easily. For example, Ritzer (1997), Seidman (1998) and Bertens (1995) follow a historical sequence as they describe and interpret the writings of key postmodern thinkers. Dickens and Fontana (1994) put together a collection of essays by people recognized as experts in the field. McRobbie (1994) puts together a collection of her own articles on postmodern culture. Rosenau (1992) develops different postmodern themes. Smart (1992) and Hall, Held and McGraw (1994) focus on postmodernism as an expression of changes in the capitalist system in the late 20th century. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) focus heavily on contradictions within postmodernism as it applies to American education.

Some social theorists discern different types of postmodern thinkers. Rosenau (1992) divides postmodern thinkers into two “broad, general orientations, the skeptical post-modernists and the affirmative post-modernists.” She argues that the skeptical postmodernists offer “a pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment, argue that the post-modern age is one of fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaninglessness, a vagueness or even absence of moral parameters and societal chaos” (p. 15). In contrast, the affirmative postmodernists “agree with the skeptical post-modernists’ critique of modernity” but are “either open to positive political action (struggle and resistance) or content with the reconfiguration of visionary, celebratory personal nondogmatic projects that range from New Age religions to New Wave life-styles” (pp. 15-16). McRobbie (1994) suggests that rather than a two-way split, “a three-way split has developed recently around postmodernism.” Her category of postmodernists who “display the excesses of postmodernism” seems to be quite similar to Rosenau’s category of skeptical postmodernists. Her category of people who are trying to find “space from which to develop that critique of the places and the spaces of exclusion inside modernity” (labelled postcolonialists) seems somewhat similar to Rosenau’s affirmative

postmodernists. McRobbie's third group are "those who refuse to admit that postmodernism engages with anything that modernism is not better able to explain" (p. 61). In other words, the third group are "modernists" who are aware of the concerns raised by postmodern thinkers but consider this to be part of the modern condition. Ritzer (1997) also delineates three types of postmodern positions—extreme, moderate and one that sees postmodern and modern social theory as alternative ways of looking at the social world (pp. 7-8). I consider myself to be a moderate postmodernist and equate my position with Rosenau's "affirmative post-modernists" and McRobbie's "postcolonialists." For me, postmodernism offers a new and positive way of understanding the contradictions and complexities, not only of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, but also of other aspects of my life.

I recognize that these social theorists' interpretations of the works of the primary postmodern writers may differ somewhat from the intent of the original writers. I use these secondary sources because I believe they are significant in their own right and because they are more accessible than the works of the primary postmodern thinkers themselves. Because these social theorists interpret postmodern thought as it applies to the social sciences, I think they offer a whole layer of ideas not found in the original work of the primary postmodern writers.

4.4. Outline of the Themes

In the rest of this chapter, I will describe what postmodern social theorists say about 20 modern/postmodern themes that I think apply to the Vancouver Island Regional Library. I will first describe the modern perspective and then describe a postmodern perspective. Because the social theorists, whose ideas form the basis of the conceptual framework, do not necessarily describe the modern concepts, in and of themselves, I will often extrapolate my description of the modern perspective from the postmodern perspective.

For each theme, I will also mention a library issue that seems to be related to the theme. I think the issues illustrate how the themes can apply to public libraries because the differences of opinion about these library issues can be seen in terms of differences between modern and postmodern perspectives. In chapter five, I will use hermeneutic interpretation to study the eleven epistemological themes described below. In chapter six I will use it to study the nine themes related to the postmodern social condition.

4.5. Modern/Postmodern Epistemological Themes

The eleven modern/postmodern epistemological themes, described below, relate to how we come to know and understand reality. These themes include modern and postmodern ways of understanding

1. Universal truth
2. Character of knowledge
3. Validity of beliefs
4. Knowing subject
5. Language
6. Binaries
7. Role of author
8. Organization of knowledge
9. Increase in information
10. Role of professionals
11. Original thoughts and intertextuality

4.5.1. Universal Truth

Social theorists suggest that modern and postmodern views of universal truth are different.

They suggest that, from the modern perspective, universal truth exists somewhere “out there” waiting to be found. For example, scientists, such as Hawking (2002), and others appear to believe that there is a “theory of everything” that can explain the physical makeup of the universe. From the modernist perspective, it is the researcher’s task to find universal truth or at least pieces of it. Ritzer (1997) comments that modern science seeks to close off conversation by finding “the answer” (p. 25).

Postmodernists, in contrast, do not accept that universal truth exists. According to Rosenau (1992), postmodernists tend to “reject universal truth and dismiss the idea that truth is ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered.” She says, “Truth makes reference to order, rules, and values, depends on logic, rationality, and reason, all of which the postmodernists question” (p. 77). McLellan (1992) credits Lyotard as recommending that “Instead of pursuing the truth, we should openly embrace the postmodern condition of uncertainty and agnostics” (p. 333). Ritzer (1997) talks about the postmodern concept of deconstruction as it applies to “truth.” He says,

Briefly, deconstructionists take a text apart to show its basic assumptions and contradictions...the goal of deconstruction is not then to put it back together in a revised, improved and truer form. Such a reconstructivist task is not undertaken because the deconstructionist rejects the idea that there is some ultimate truth to be discovered...there are no ultimate answers; there are only more interpretations, more texts to be “read.” (p. 10)

I think understanding the difference between modern and postmodern perceptions of truth can help us understand public libraries better by suggesting different ways of seeing what is “going on” in a public library reference transaction. In chapter five, I will begin to look at how the way we understand truth can affect the way we evaluate the Vancouver Island Regional Library’s reference service.

4.5.2. Character of Knowledge

Social scientists also suggest that modern and postmodern perspectives about the epistemological character of knowledge differ from each other.

According to McLennan (1992) modernists view knowledge “as a privileged unified body of mental ‘thought’ which exists in the collective Mind, and which is guarded preciously by an elite of scientists, philosophers and academics” (p. 333). This knowledge is based in empirical evidence (Seidman, 1998, p. 295). Referring to scientific knowledge, Bertens suggests that “modern science worked towards stable, timeless representations of the world” (p. 126). Referring to Lyotard’s view of social scientific knowledge, McLennan (1992) states that “The governing assumption of Enlightenment thought for Lyotard, is... that society ‘out there’ can be progressively ‘captured’ by social scientific knowledge without any recourse whatsoever to the taints and comforts of personal and social narrative” (p. 231). In other words, from the modern perspective, it appears that true, unified knowledge can be found and that it must be protected by elite groups.

A postmodern view of knowledge can be summed up by Lyotard’s assertion that “this whole Enlightenment picture of ‘pure’ knowledge is itself nothing but a very powerful myth: in effect precisely a narrative of sorts” (McLennan, 1992, p. 231). In other words the concept that true, unified knowledge exists is simply a modern grand theory which postmodernists treat with incredulity and scepticism. Ritzer (1997) suggests that, for postmodernists, reality “can only be known narrowly and interpretively” and that “what is real cannot be separated from the interpretation of it” (p. 3). In a somewhat similar vein, Seidman (1994a) suggests that postmodernists see knowledge “as poetically and politically constituted, ‘made’ by human communicative action that develops historically and is institutionalized politically” (p. 229).

Referring to scientific knowledge, Seidman (1994a) comments,

In a universe increasingly perceived as unstable and unpredictable..., it is more likely that the limits, uncertainty and incompleteness of knowledge will be underscored. In this regard, Lyotard describes the rise of a postmodern science. Such knowledges abandoned absolute standards, universal categories, and grand theories. (p. 5)

Similarly, Bertens (1995) suggests that “postmodern science seeks to be expressly anti-representational. In other words, it seeks to prevent consensus, which indeed, is exactly what it from Lyotard’s point of view must do, unlikely as that may seem” (p. 126).

Referring to social scientific knowledge, Seidman (1994a) states postmodern knowledge favours “local, historically contextualized, and pragmatic types of social inquiry. The value of postmodern knowledges lies in making us aware of and tolerant toward social differences, ambiguity, and conflict” (p. 5). Rosenau (1992) comments that “Post-modern social science presumes methods that multiply paradox, inventing ever more elaborate repertoires of questions, each of which encourages an infinity of answers, rather than methods that settle on solutions” (p. 117). In other words, to postmodernists, knowledge, including scientific and social scientific knowledge, is incomplete, uncertain, and ambiguous.

I think it is useful to think about public libraries in terms of modern and postmodern views of knowledge. I think the way we understand the epistemological character of knowledge can have a significant affect on how we perceive the Vancouver Island Regional Library’s collection and will discuss this further in chapter five.

Postmodern thought also sees knowledge from an economic perspective—as commodity that can be bought and sold. I think this is an important theme but it is outside the scope of this thesis.

4.5.3. Validity of Beliefs

There also seems to be a significant difference between the modern and postmodern views about the validity of beliefs.

From the modern perspective only beliefs based on empirical evidence and reason are valid. For a belief to be considered valid it must be based on scientific “‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ knowledge of the world” (McLennan, 1992, p. 231) and on reason that “assumes universalism, unifying integration, the view that the same rules apply everywhere” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 128). In other words, from the modern perspective, for a belief to be valid it must meet the modern criteria for true knowledge.

According to Kvale (1992), from a postmodern perspective, “it is maintained that when there are no longer any objective truths or universal values to be pursued; all knowledge and values become equally valid and relative” (p. 8). In other words there is no ultimate truth to be discovered because reality can only be known narrowly and interpretively and because “each situation is different and calls for special understanding” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 128). Seidman (1994a) makes a similar point when he comments that “The shift from metanarratives to local narratives and from general theories to pragmatic strategies suggests that in place of assuming a universal mind or a rational knowing subject, we imagine multiple minds, subjects, and knowledges reflecting different social locations and history” (p. 5). In other words, in postmodern thought, valid beliefs based in science are replaced by “the myriad stories or ‘fables’ that we invent in order to give meaning and significance to our lives” (McLennan, 1992, p. 231).

I think that library theorists’ position that librarians must maintain a neutral stance, particularly when it comes to providing a balanced collection, can be illuminated by modern and postmodern views of the validity of beliefs. In chapter five I will explore

this modern/postmodern theme more fully and interpret Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders' views about the concept of the balanced collection.

4.5.4. The Knowing Subject

Modern and postmodern views of the knowing subject also seem to differ.

Social scientists suggest that from the modern perspective we are able to step outside reality and see it from, what Seidman (1994a) calls, a “God’s eye point of view.” Another way of stating this is that modernists perceive “man” as the seeing “subject in the midst of mere objects” (p. 5). In a similar vein, Madison (1990) quotes Heidegger’s observation that “the two ontological characteristics of modernity are the world’s becoming a *picture* or representation and simultaneously, man’s becoming a representing *subject* in the midst of mere objects.” He goes on to say, “The two great theoretical by-products of modern, epistemologically centered philosophy which places all the emphasis on method... are the notions of subjectivity and a fully objective, deterministic world” (p. x). In other words, man is able to observe the rest of reality in a perfectly unbiased way. This belief underlies positivist researchers’ belief that, if they follow correct unbiased methodology, they can discover valid, reliable scientific and social scientific truths.

From a postmodern perspective it appears that it is not possible for an observer to be separated from what is being observed. The “God’s eye view” is not achievable because we are rooted in our own experiences and are part of what we observe and know. For Madison (1990) this means “the end of what modernism understood by ‘the subject,’ and it means as well the end of the ‘objective world’” (p. x). This understanding is used by non-positivist researchers when they recognize that their research is always limited, personal and biased. It is closely related to the notion of validity of all beliefs since, in this way of thinking, all beliefs are personal and biased

and no-one can ascend to the knowing subject's position and discern what is truly valid. It is also closely related to postmodern views of truth since, if there is no ultimate truth or answer, there can be no ultimate truth finder or knower. This postmodern concept is sometimes called "the death of the subject."

I think that a postmodern notion of the death of the subject could effect how we understand the role of librarians in a public library. How this theme relates to Vancouver Island Regional Library librarians' attempts to create a balanced collection will be further discussed in chapter five.

4.5.5. Language

The only way that we can express our views about truth, knowledge, belief and so on, is through language. Yet modern and postmodern views about how well language lets us do this are quite different.

From the modern perspective it appears that language can be used to express the truth. Language allows us to communicate clearly with each other. In fact, if we carefully follow the conventions of language we can "tell it like it is." In other words, for modernists, language works.

From a postmodern perspective it appears that language does not work in the way modernists think it does. Rosenau (1992) states that "linguistic meaning, always personal and idiosyncratic, can never be communicated from one person to another. Language has a will and power of its own. It generates meaning independently of 'human agency or will' (Norris, 1988, p. 176)" (p. 79). Fox (1995) suggests that Derrida's term "'difference' concerns the fundamental undecidability which resides in language and its continual deferral of meaning, the slippage of meaning which occurs as soon as one tries to pin a concept down." In other words, language does not help us to communicate as effectively as we think it should.

Not only does language influence how we are able to describe reality, but it also influences how we are able to understand it. For example, according to Gergen (1992), postmodernists recognize that we “rely on conventions of language.” In fact, “we must make use of these conventions or we fail to communicate at all. Yet, these conventions simultaneously govern what can be communicated.” The result for Gergen is that “one may never exit the language... to give a true and accurate portrayal of what is the case. Understanding of the world is thus a product not of the world as it is, but of textual history” (p. 22). In a similar vein, Ritzer (1997) comments that for postmodernists

Meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world are shaped by the structures of language. Thus, instead of an existential world of people shaping their surroundings, we are being shaped by the structures of language and its code, or arbitrary rules for combining words (p. 29).

Brown (1989), quoted in Seidman (1994a), suggests that “it has become a commonplace that social and cultural reality, and the social sciences themselves, are linguistic constructions” (p. 229). Rosenau points out the relationship between truth and language. For postmodernists, truth is dependent on language and this dependence is “a serious restriction.” According to Rosenau, moderate postmodernists (or affirmatives) “argue that there can be a certain consensus about words or concepts, as is the case for professional social scientists.” However, “Meaning is still erratic in the sense that it is always acquired, shaped, or invented by professional or social interaction” (p. 80). In other words, language influences what we are able to think. Putting into words a new understanding, such as the difference between positivist and non-positivist paradigms, can be very difficult. As we force the thought into words, the idea can slide away and change. For postmodernists, language does not work in the way that modernists think it does.

I think that because libraries deal in language, postmodern insights into language can illuminate our understanding of public libraries. How modern and postmodern views of language may affect the Vancouver Island Regional Library's understanding of library subject headings and signage will be further considered in chapter five.

4.5.6. Binaries

One of the interesting features of language that postmodern thinkers focus on is the concept of binary word pairs. As mentioned previously, binaries are pairs of words that have opposite meanings.

From the modern perspective it appears that words in a binary pair each describe a real aspect of reality. Water is cold. Water is hot. Water is warm. Each term describes the real temperature of water and has nothing to do with the meaning of the other term.

From a postmodern perspective it appears that the meanings of words in a binary pair do not come from their relationship to the world but from their relationship to each other. For example, Ritzer (1997) quotes Saussure (1966) as saying that “the meaning of the word hot comes not from some intrinsic property of the ‘real world’ but from the word’s relationship with, its binary opposition to, the word cold” (p. 29). According to Seidman (1998), “Derrida detected a series of binary oppositions in Western thought that have been pivotal in efforts to establish an order of truth.” Examples of these pairs of words include “speech/writing, presence/absence, meaning/form, soul/body, masculine/feminine, man/woman, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, cause/effect.” For Derrida (1976), these binaries “lie at the core of Western culture” because the two terms “do not represent equal values. The first term is considered superior; the second term is defined as derivative, undesirable, and subordinate” (p.221). Seidman also comments,

Poststructuralism aims to disturb the dominant binary meanings that function to perpetuate social and political hierarchies. Deconstructionism is the method deployed. This involves unsettling and displacing the binary hierarchies. Deconstructionism uncovers their historically contingent origin and their political role not with an eye to providing a better foundation for knowledge and society but in order to dislodge their dominance and to create a social space which is tolerant of difference, ambiguity, and playful innovation, and favors autonomy and democracy. (1994a, p. 19)

Libraries use a number of binary word pairs. Probably the most ubiquitous is the non-fiction/fiction binary. It is not clear which partner in the binary pair is dominant or, if indeed, either partner is dominant. I will discuss modern and postmodern views about this binary as it relates to the Vancouver Island Regional Library in more depth in chapter five.

4.5.7. Role of Author

There seems to be a significant difference between modern and postmodern views of the role of the author.

From the modern perspective it appears that authors are important and have special knowledge of the things they write about. The author is the expert and what the author is trying to say is what is important. The work itself is a “‘readerly’ text (lisible), which is to be read for a specific message, destined for a passive reader, and which resists being rewritten by the reader” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 35). Readers do not need to do anything to contribute to the development of the meaning of the work except to read it. However, the text can be better understood by readers who understand the personality of the author.

In contrast, according to Rosenau (1992), a postmodern perspective holds that the concept of the author is “a relatively recent historical development” and that “in the near future the author may, again, disappear entirely.” For example “there is no author in the modern sense for commercial ads, television scripts, radio dialogue, or the speeches

delivered by political candidates” (p. 29). Postmodernists “diminish the importance of the author and amplify the significance of the text and the reader.” For postmodernists, “meaning does not inhere in the text; it resides in the interaction between the text and reader” (p. 25). Madison (1990) echoes this concept when he quotes Calvino (1986) as saying “the spirit in which one reads is decisive: it is up to the reader to see to it that literature exerts its critical force and this can occur independently of the author’s intentions” (p. xv). In other words, the empowered reader can deconstruct the work of the author by interpreting the author’s biases, which must always exist in the text because authors, like the rest of us, cannot ascend to the modern position of knowing subject. The reader can find a very different meaning in the text than the author thought was being presented. This postmodern concept is sometimes known as the death of the author. I think the death of the author is also related to Baudrillard’s idea, mentioned above, that nothing is “really original in the sense of being the exclusive work of a particular author; everything is a copy, a simulacrum” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 29). In other words, for postmodernists, authors are no longer important because all texts are interrelated through, what I refer to below, as intertextuality. The work itself is “called a ‘writerly text’ (scriptable) because it is rewritten with every encounter (reading)” (p. 35).

I think it is useful to consider libraries in terms of modern and postmodern views of the role of the author since all the works in a library have an author of some sort. In chapter five, different ways of understanding the role of authors in the context of the Vancouver Island Regional Library will be further considered.

4.5.8. Organization of Knowledge

There seems to be a fundamental difference between the modern view of how knowledge should be organized and a postmodern view of knowledge organization.

From the modern perspective it appears that knowledge can be organized into discreet academic disciplines. For example, according to Ritzer (1997), modernists have a tendency “to put boundaries between such things as academic disciplines” (p. 9).

Seidman (1998) suggests that “According to Baudrillard, modernity has been characterized by the explosion of new divisions.” In other words “science is marked off from literature and philosophy” (p. 231). Seidman (1994a) also comments,

Recall the guiding premises of the human sciences in the modern epoch. The disciplines have been organized around the following assumptions: the privileging of science as knowledge, the establishment of foundation, efforts to elaborate basic premises and concepts into general theories, laws, models, and explanations, the mathematization of knowledge, the separation of fact and values, the exclusion of moral and political from science, the pursuit of scientific progress through instituting an austere culture of methodological rigor, empiricism, and conceptual justification based upon truth claims. (p. 16)

In other words, from the modern perspective, knowledge can be organized according to the strict guiding principles that differentiate between the disciplines.

On the other hand, a postmodern perspective blurs “the lines between science, literature, and ideology, between literature and literary criticism, between philosophy and cultural criticism, and between cultural criticism and popular criticism.” In their place are “new interdisciplinary, hybrid knowledges such as feminism, lesbian and gay studies, ethnic studies, urban studies, and cultural studies.” Furthermore, “The lines between science, literature, and ideology, between literature and literary criticism, between philosophy and cultural criticism, and between cultural criticism and popular criticism, have blurred considerably.” As a result, “As disciplinary boundaries and the line between science and nonscience blur, as claims to universal knowledge lack credibility, as knowledges are viewed as interlaced with rhetoric and power, the very meaning of knowledge is changing” (Seidman, 1994a, p. 2). In other words, the rigorous

modern principles which differentiate between the disciplines are found by postmodernists to have no interest or value.

Since one of the key functions of public libraries has always been to organize large quantities of knowledge and information in a way that is logical and easy to find, I think libraries need to consider these different views about the organization of knowledge. I will consider the way the Vancouver Island Regional Library organizes its collection further in chapter five.

4.5.9. Increase in Information

Modern and postmodern views about the growth of information vary considerably.

From the modern perspective it appears that the increase in the amount of information benefits society. As we gather more and more information, we come closer to understanding reality and reaching universal truth. In other words the expansion of information is under control.

From a postmodern perspective it appears otherwise. For example, Baudrillard (1983) argues that ““there is more and more information, and less and less meaning”” (Smart, 1992, p. 127). Smart (1992) also notes that “Baudrillard muses on the possible need for an ‘information dietetics’ and/or ‘institutions to uninform’” (p. 137). Smart (1993) quotes Bauman (1991) as suggesting that “more knowledge has not meant less ignorance, for ‘the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance’” (p. 105). In other words, from a postmodern view more and more information is not bringing us closer to understanding reality. McLennan (1992) suggests, “The control of information... is quite central nowadays to economic production, political opinion-forming and military control alike. Nothing could be more significant than that” (p. 333). In other words, information needs to be controlled and made accessible in an orderly way.

Since public libraries have long seen themselves as storehouses of information, it seems worthwhile to consider the difference between these two views in relation to libraries. I will discuss this topic as it relates to the Vancouver Island Regional Library further in chapter five.

4.5.10. Role of Professionals

Another area in which modern and postmodern thought differ is in relation to the role of professionals.

From the modern perspective it appears that professionals have expertise in an area of knowledge or a discipline. Professionals can be depended upon to use their expertise to solve the problems of society. Hence professionals should be respected and trusted.

Several different postmodern views of professionals appear in the literature. I will list them here in point form for the sake of clarity:

1. Smart (1992) mentions Illich's view that

people have become too accustomed to relying on "experts" and professionals for their knowledge. In effect individuals have become knowledge-consumers, dependent upon the provision of "objective" knowledge commodities by institutions accorded authority and responsibility for the discovery and dissemination of more and "better" forms of knowledge and information. As a result the confidence of people in their own ability to make judgments, take decisions, and find out about events and processes occurring in the world, has been eroded, if not entirely undermined. (p. 106)

2. Rosenau (1992) states, "In the fields of administration and public planning, suspicion of rational organization encourages a retreat from central planning, a withdrawal of confidence from specialists and experts" (p. 7). In the same vein, Ritzer (1997) quotes Bauman's (1992) argument that "experts are regularly doing things that lead people to question that trust" (p. 166). In other words, professionals are not solving contemporary problems and people no longer trust

them or have confidence in them. This is troubling if people have also lost confidence in their own ability to make judgments.

3. Smart (1992) describes the reaction to the growing number of occupations which claim to be professions. “Rather than refer to an increasing professionalisation of society it might be appropriate to note the signs of a growing ‘proleterianisation’ of the professions” (p. 38).

It seems clear that from a number of perspectives, postmodern thought does not see professionals in a positive light.

An interesting feature of public libraries is the traditional hierarchy of the staff, with professional librarians at the top and the non-professional clerical staff in the middle, and the part-time student workers or pages at the bottom. Into this mix, recently, have been thrust computer technicians, a group who do not fit neatly into the traditional hierarchy. I think that postmodern views about professionals could have a profound effect on the Vancouver Island Regional Library and will discuss this theme in more detail in chapter five.

4.5.11. Original Thoughts and Intertextuality

Modern and postmodern views about original thoughts and intertextuality vary significantly from each other.

Social scientists suggest that from the modern perspective it is possible to have a truly original thought. It is possible to think about something that no-one has ever thought about before.

In contrast, according to Madison (1990), from a postmodern perspective “a genuine ‘original thought’ is, as we know, a metaphysical fiction. A whole host of other texts speak in these texts, and there is little, if anything, that they say which has not already been said in one form or another” (p. viii). Barthes (1977), quoted in Fox

(1995), argues that “intertextuality is the process whereby one text plays upon other texts, the ways in which texts refer endlessly to further elements within the realm of cultural production... Intertextuality is a feature of every text” (p. 1).

Rosenau (1992) interprets intertextuality somewhat differently. She comments that “Intertextuality is a common post-modern substitute for modern social science’s causal explanation. Modern social science has assumed causality and prediction were essential to explanation.” However “post-modernists consider both uninteresting because... the requirements of temporal priority and independent, external reality assumed by these concepts are dubious.” In other words, “in a world where everything is related in an absolute interactive way, temporal priority, required by causality, is nearly impossible to establish” (p. 112). This interpretation of intertextuality as a replacement of causality is interesting. I use it in this thesis when I say something is “related” to something else rather saying something is the “result of” something else.

I think it is interesting to think about the Vancouver Island Regional Library in terms of a postmodern concept of intertextuality. The issue of libraries, original thought and intertextuality will be considered further in chapter five.

In this part of chapter four I have described eleven modern/postmodern epistemological themes. In chapter five, I will attempt to interpret comments made by stakeholders that I think are related to these themes. In the process new ideas about the Vancouver Island Regional Library will be evoked.

4.6. Modern/Postmodern Social Themes

The nine modern/postmodern social themes, described below, relate to how libraries exist in the postmodern social condition. These themes include modern and postmodern ways of understanding

1. Power

2. The panoptic principle and the disciplinary society
3. Social problems
4. Significant groups
5. Feminism
6. Culture
7. Paranormal beliefs and religion
8. Waged work
9. Bureaucracy.

4.6.1. Power

Modern and postmodern views of power appear to be different from each other.

From the modern perspective it appears that power is institutionalized in an organization's formal bureaucratic structures.

Postmodernists seem to see power in a number of different but interrelated ways. I will list them here in point form for the sake of clarity:

1. Power seems to be intimately related to knowledge. For example, Richer (1992) quotes Foucault (1979)¹⁸ as stating that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is not any power relation without the correlative constitution of some field of knowledge, not any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (p. 111). In other words, not only does having knowledge make a person powerful, but the group in power determines what knowledge is of worth.

¹⁸ Although Foucault did not consider himself to be postmodern, his ideas are seen by postmodern theorists as being criticisms of modernism and hence he is considered to be postmodern.

2. Power appears to be diffuse. It permeates all social relationships. For example, Ritzer (1997) quotes Foucault (1980) as saying that “power is *not* an institution, a structure, a superstructure.... Power is omnipresent... ‘because it is produced from one moment to the next... in every relation from one point to another’” (p. 66). In other words, no-one “has power” but power is produced and changes in relationships.
3. Power appears to exist in “fellowships of discourse, that prevent those outside those realms from speaking, at least with any authority.” Moreover, “education and credentials are used as mechanisms to appropriate discourse; those with proper credentials may speak, others may not” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 46). In other words, the ways groups construct their understanding of reality place them in relationships of power with other groups.

I think looking at the Vancouver Island Regional Library in terms of postmodern perceptions of power can help us better understand the complex relationships between the various stakeholders and will talk about it further in chapter six.

4.6.2. The Panoptic Principle and Disciplinary Society

From a postmodern perspective, it appears that modern society has established methods to control various groups of people. For example, Foucault describes how prisoners are controlled to ensure they are punished for wrong doing, factory workers are controlled to ensure they are productive, students are controlled to ensure that they will learn the right things, and patients are controlled to ensure that their diseases can be treated (p. 61).

One of the ways this control is exercised within the postmodern social condition is through what are described as the panoptic principle and the disciplinary society. The panoptic principle suggests that a small number of people, using technology, can

observe and control the behaviour of many others. The disciplinary society suggests that, if people being observed panoptically deviate from expected norms, they will be “subjected to micro-penalties for violations relating to such things as time (for being late)” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 57). These micro-penalties turn people into “the self-monitoring subject[s]” who follow the prescribed norms “as much on some threat of coercion as on the omnipresent possibility of surveillance.” Furthermore, “Once surveillance has been discursively incorporated into the subject... the actual mechanism of coercion can be removed, as long as the perception of the threat of coercion remains in the subject’s mind” (Campbell & Carlson, 2002, p. 590).

I think that looking at the Vancouver Island Regional Library in terms of the panoptic principle and the disciplinary society can help us develop a different understanding of the Library’s practice of imposing fines on customers who break our norms by returning materials “late.” I will look further into these issues in chapter six.

4.6.3. Social Problems

Another feature of the postmodern social condition is the use of moral panics to deal with social problems. McRobbie (1994) states that

moral panics remain one of the most effective strategies of the right for securing popular support for its values and policies. And this point needs to be made, that the moral panic has been inextricably connected with conservatism and that it also marks a moment of connection between “the media” and “social control.” (p. 198)

Furthermore, moral panics work by

instilling fear in people and, in so doing, encouraging them to try to turn away from the complexity and the visible social problems of everyday life and either retreat to a “fortress mentality”—a feeling of hopelessness, political powerlessness and paralysis or adopt a gung-ho “something must be done about it” attitude. (p. 198)

Moral panics seem to be based in “modernity’s search for an ethical code that is nonambivalent and lacking in contradictions” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 166).

In contrast, postmodernists seem to think that it is unreasonable to expect everyone to agree to an overarching ethical code. Instead we are each responsible for our own moral choices. Postrel (1999) describes Fukuyama's (1999) views on this:

Order breaks down, yes, but it also reemerges, because "we human beings are by nature designed to create moral rules and social order for ourselves." The answer to the current problems is not "a full-scale retreat into one of the traditional cultures of the past but a bottom-up dynamic process of developing new habits and institutions under changed circumstances." The reconstitution of social order for the United States and other societies in a similar position, then, is not a matter of rebuilding of hierarchical authority. It is a matter of reestablishing habits of honest reciprocity, and an enlarged radius of trust under changed technological circumstances.

Moral panics have been used to deal with the widespread accessibility of pornography which seems to be part of the postmodern social condition. Bell (1976), quoted in Dickens (1994), argues that "for the masses there is now 'pornotopia,' the tedious revelling in pornography and kinky sex, mass produced and marketed by commercial entrepreneurs (writers, moviemakers, musicians, magazine editors, and advertisers)" (p. 85). U.S. President George W. Bush used a moral panic approach in regard to legislation on child pornography when he commented, "With the Internet... pornography is now instantly available to any child who has a computer. And in the hands of the wrong people, in the hands of incredibly wicked people, the Internet is a tool that lures children into real danger" (Jeffrey, 2002, p. 4).

In chapter six I will interpret Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders' comments about moral panics and the accessibility of pornography through the Library's public Internet access computers. I think looking at these issues in terms of postmodern thought can provide us with new insights.

4.6.4. Significant Groups

Another feature of the postmodern social condition is an increased interest in groups that have been marginalized by modern society. For example, Bertens (1995) argues

that postmodernism's "interest in those who from the point of view of the liberal humanist subject (white, male, heterosexual, and rational) constitute the 'Other'—the collective of those excluded from the privileges accorded by that subject to itself" is "especially important." Examples of "Other" include "women, people of color, non-heterosexuals, children" (p. 8). Rosenau (1992) makes a similar point when she argues that postmodern social scientists

support a re-focusing on what has been taken for granted, what has been neglected, regions of resistance, the forgotten, the irrational, the insignificant, the repressed, the borderline, the classical, the sacred, the traditional, the eccentric, the sublimated, the subjugated, the rejected, the nonessential, the marginal, the peripheral, the excluded. (p. 8)

The Vancouver Island Regional Library provides service to a number of marginalized groups. The group I think it focuses most attention on is people living in rural and remote parts of the Regional Library area. I think that looking at the service that the Vancouver Island Regional Library provides to these rural areas in terms of a postmodern interest in marginalized groups can help us understand the Library differently. I will discuss this further in chapter six.

4.6.5. Feminism

It seems that feminism, which began as a project of modernity, in that it established new metanarratives of how the genders relate, has also taken a postmodern turn. According to Seidman (1998), "feminism refers to the ideas produced primarily by women for the purpose of changing their self-awareness and changing society. They assumed that men and women are socially formed and that social explanations can be given for why men are dominant" (p. 255). Seidman describes three basic approaches to modern feminism—liberal feminism, radical feminism and gynocentric feminism. He suggests that despite their differences, feminists of the 1960s and 1970s were united by gynocentric feminism that said women were "unified by the universality of male

dominance; their shared similar experiences, disposition, values, and interests by virtue of male oppression and female resistance” (pp. 259-60). This changed in the 1980s:

The leadership of the women’s movement had been in the hands of White, middle class, often university-educated women since the late 1960s. Questions of race and class had bothered feminists through the seventies. Yet it was not until the early eighties that women of color coalesced into an organized force to speak with a public voice that could no longer be silenced. (p. 261)

This was the beginning of a postmodern feminism which, while still seeing that “the category of ‘women’ is normative and political,” also sees that “There is no core gender identity based on common psychological dispositions, cultural values, or social positioning that neatly marks off women from men. Gender always bears multiple, conflicting, and shifting meanings; it is a site of ongoing social conflict.” Postmodern feminists “favor using categories involving multiple, composite selves (e.g. White, middle-class, heterosexual, twentieth century women) and acknowledging the permanent multiplicity and instability of feminist knowledges and politics” (p. 264).

Farganis (1994) comments that “feminists find postmodernism’s emphasis on deconstructing previous thought systems that exclude or are prejudiced against women and its emphasis on persons as political actors with possibilities to rewrite history” to be “attractive” (p. 118).

In contrast, McRobbie (1994) suggests that for feminists “it has become standard either to remain uncommitted in relation to postmodernism or else, rather reluctantly, to defend modernity.... Modernity, it has been argued, provided the spaces for a discourse of freedom, emancipation and equality to emerge” (p. 6). The problem with “abandoning modernity as an enabling structure is the fear of losing the notion of the women’s movement, losing the idea of what it is to be a woman, and losing with this a politics of representation, that is able to speak on behalf of women” (p. 7).

Since the majority of people who work for Vancouver Island Regional Library are women, it seems worthwhile to consider the library in terms of modern and postmodern feminist thought. As will be seen in chapter six, feminist theory of any sort seems to have had little impact on the stakeholders who participated in this study.

4.6.6. Culture

From the modern perspective it appears that an elite or high culture exists and that it is of greater value than low or mass market culture or the culture of other ethnic groups. In contrast, from a postmodern perspective, there is no difference between elite or high culture and popular or low culture. Smart (1992) explains this by citing Huyssen (1984, p. 26),

At the centre of this genuinely postmodern culture is a dissolution of the distance between “high” and popular, or “low” culture intrinsic to modernism. In other words “the great divide that separated high modernism from mass culture and that was codified in the various classical accounts of modernism no longer seems relevant to postmodern artistic or critical sensibilities.” (p. 168)

In a similar vein Seidman (1998) quotes Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) as saying that “culture saturates society” and that “high culture is just one aspect of culture” (p. 200).

Likewise, from a postmodern perspective the culture of different ethnic groups is seen to be as much a part of the community’s culture as is the culture of the dominant group. For example, Ritzer (1997) quotes Bauman (1992) as stating that “permanent and irreducible pluralism of cultures, communal traditions, ideologies, ‘forms of life’” is the main feature of postmodernity. It no longer makes sense to try to secure “the global hegemony of a ‘superior’ culture” (p. 163). Rosenau (1992) suggests,

Post-modernists in the Third World argue that Western ideas, assumed synonymous with “the modern,” have had a corrupting effect on the purity of their original indigenous cultures. These post-modernists speak of a return to the past; recapturing all that was valued and sacred in their own, now lost, primitive

traditions, renouncing all that the colonial powers required, retrieving all that decades of Western imperialism negated and made a shambles of. (p. 153)

Whether the Regional Library should preserve and lend artefacts that represent “the global hegemony of a ‘superior culture’” or artefacts that represent a much broader range of culture including low culture and/or the culture of minority ethnic groups is something that I think needs to be thought about. In chapter six I will briefly interpret stakeholders’ comments related to this question.

4.6.7. Paranormal Beliefs and Religion

Another feature of the postmodern social condition, mentioned by many postmodern social theorists, seems to be an increased interest in paranormal beliefs and religion. Rosenau (1992) talks about postmodernism’s interest in “the supernatural and the occult” and its “fascination with the Black Goddess, the Sixth Sense, the secret ‘lost’ years of Jesus’ life, astrology, astronomical pilgrimages, horoscopes, tarot, auras, dowsing, ESP, palm-reading, numerology, vampires, werewolves, Big Foot, mummies that live” (p. 148). Ritzer (1997) talks about the importance given to such things as “metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, magic, myth, religious sentiment, and mystical experience” (p. 9). Seidman (1994a) says that “the resurgence of religious fundamentalism” is a feature of postmodernism (p. 1). Smart (1993), citing Levin (1988), comments,

The resurrection of the “sacred” as a sphere of experience pertinent to modern forms of life, as a counter to the nihilism of the modern world and the “vision of reason that brought that world into being” certainly constitutes a part of what has been described as the postmodern condition. (p. 89)

Citing Toffler (1971, p. 407), Smart (1992) also states,

In the “postmodern” context there has been a “garish revival of mysticism”; and emphasis on the emotional rather than the rational and/or scientific; a “reversion to prescientific attitudes... accompanied... by a tremendous wave of nostalgia in the society”, a promotion of spontaneity; and an antipathy shared by a “strange coalition of rightwingers and New Leftists.” (p. 71)

Armstrong (2000) agrees that there is an increase in religious belief but she interprets religious fundamentalism, not as a return to prescientific attitudes, but as existing “in a symbiotic relationship with an aggressive liberalism or secularism.” She sees fundamentalists as being, in their way, “as addicted to scientific rationalism as any other modernists” (p. 178).

Not all postmodern thinkers see postmodern Western civilization as being interested in spiritual values. In fact, Smart (1992) says that both Toynbee and Bell saw the “crisis of postmodern Western civilisation as essentially one of the absence or loss of spiritual values and belief” (Smart, 1992: p. 166}.

The Vancouver Island Regional Library seems to provide a wide range of materials about paranormal beliefs and religion as well as works written by sceptics who criticize such concepts. In chapter six I will further discuss these types of materials.

4.6.8. Waged Work

The postmodern social condition can also be seen to include changes in how work is understood. For example, Bell (1976), quoted in Allen (1992), states that because postmodern work is transformed by knowledge, it “leads to a fall in the number of manual, manufacturing jobs. At the same time, the growth of the service sector is represented as a source of non-manual work which involves at least some degree of creativity and sociability.” Meanwhile “manual jobs give way to white-collar and professional occupations. In this view, old skills requiring strength and physical dexterity have given way to new forms of ‘think’ work” which is transforming ‘the working class’” (p. 174). Gorz is less optimistic. Allen (1992), quotes Gorz (1982), as arguing that “the new technologies are altering the structure of employment within society, and that this has led to a social division between an ‘aristocracy’ of secure, well-paid workers... and a growing mass of unemployed.” In between these two

extremes, Gorz sees the majority of “post-industrial working class, for whom work no longer represents a source of identity or a meaningful activity” (p. 179). According to Smart (1992), “the micro-electronic revolution has precipitated a reduction in the levels of labour necessary for production, eliminated established crafts and skills, and accelerated the disaffection with waged work” (p. 87).

I think that an understanding of postmodern work can help us understand the Vancouver Island Regional Library as a workplace and will discuss stakeholders’ views about waged work in chapter six.

4.6.9. Bureaucracy

The last theme related to the postmodern social condition that I will briefly explore in this thesis relates to modern and postmodern views of bureaucracy. Seidman (1998) states that one of the features of modernism was that “the spread of bureaucracy and its utilitarian, status-oriented culture to all modern institutions fashioned a society of other-directed, spiritually bland, and apolitical individuals, ruled by a soulless bureaucracy” (p. 78). He describes bureaucracy as follows

Bureaucratization implies a unique administrative and social order; social institutions are organized according to a spirit of impersonality and professionalism. Bureaucratic institutions are divided into offices, each defined by a specific function and social role; offices are arranged in a hierarchical way so that there is a kind of top-down command system; individuals are assigned specific roles with clearly marked duties and authority. Bureaucratic business is carried out according to a set of impersonal rules and procedures that aim to exclude personal considerations and conflicts from interfering with institutional operations. (p. 80)

Rosenau (1992) states that post-modernists “challenge modern priorities: career, office, individual responsibility, bureaucracy” (p. 5). In other words, modern bureaucracy is looked on with suspicion in the postmodern social condition.

The Vancouver Island Regional Library has been run as a bureaucracy for many years. I think an understanding of the difference between modern and postmodern views

of bureaucracy can provide insights into understanding the relationships between stakeholders in the Regional Library. In chapter six I will interpret the Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders' comments related to this theme.

4.7. Conclusion

In chapter four, I have described the conceptual framework that is being used in this thesis. The postmodern/modern themes and related library issues that were discussed in this chapter are summed up by the following table.

Table 6.
Summary of Epistemological Themes and Library Issues

	Epistemological themes	Examples of related library question
1	The nature of truth	How do we evaluate reference service?
2	The character of knowledge	What kind of knowledge is in the collection?
3	Validity of belief	What is a balanced collection?
4	The knowing subject	Can librarians select a balanced collection?
5	Nature of language	Can we provide better subject headings?
6	Binary pairs	What do we mean by fiction and non-fiction?
7	Role of author	Should libraries offer author readings?
8	Organization of knowledge	How do we organize the collection?
9	Increase in information	How can libraries deal with "infoglut"?
10	Role of professionals	How different are clerks and librarians?
11	Original thoughts	Do public libraries have a future?

Table 7.
Summary of Social Themes and Library Issues

	Social themes	Examples of related library question
1	Power	How do people relate within the Library?
2	The panoptic principle	Do libraries have to charge overdue fines?
3	Social problems	What about Internet pornography?
4	Significant groups	What does the Library mean in a rural area?
5	Postmodern feminism	Is a female dominated workforce an issue?
6	Culture	What should be in the collection?
7	Paranormal beliefs	What about religious and paranormal materials?
8	Waged work	What is the nature of library work?
9	Bureaucracy	How do we deal with bureaucracy?

In the course of developing this thesis I identified other themes which also appear to have potential for helping us to understand the Vancouver Island Regional Library differently. However in the interest of brevity, I am either not including them in the

final written document or only touching on them in relation to other themes. Themes that relate to the Vancouver Island Regional Library that I think might be worth studying in the future are listed in the following table.

**Table 8.
Other Possible Themes**

	Other possible themes	Examples of related library question
1	Unitary self	Can we separate work from life?
2	Simulacra	Are the items in a library simulations?
3	Politics of difference	How do politics affect libraries?
4	The masses	Who are non-users?
5	Death of history	Why does the library have history books?
6	Elimination of time and space	How do stakeholders use the VIRL Website?
7	Prevalence of pornography	How do we handle online pornography?
8	The media	Why do libraries provide newspapers?
9	Paranormal beliefs	Should libraries have books on Tarot, etc.?
10	Flexible methods	Is the library too rule bound?
11	Product innovation	Should we provide new services?
12	Just-in-time methods	How do people use the Internet and databases?
13	Greater customization	Can we serve different people differently?
14	Capitalism	Should we spend tax dollars on libraries?
15	Information technology	How has technology changed libraries?
16	Commodification of knowledge	Can libraries bridge the information divide?
17	Consumerism	Are library customers defined by their library use?

In chapter five I will begin a hermeneutic interpretation of comments made by stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library that I think are related to the modern/postmodern epistemological themes.

After Chapter Four

I am worried that there are too many themes.

Each theme could be a thesis itself.

But I want to talk about them all—they are so interesting and so inter-related. I want to create a pastiche of ideas in which new ideas will bubble up.

Before Chapter Five

I had been looking forward to writing chapter five because I thought my data was so rich and full of unexpected ideas. I had carefully coded everything using QSR NudistVivo and was confident that writing about the modern/postmodern themes I had described in chapter four would be a snap.

Of course, it wasn't. As I chopped quotations from the transcript, they seemed to shrivel up and become mere husk of themselves. The excitement that I had experienced in the interviews and focus groups seemed to evaporate. Everything became dry and academic.

I left in a few irrelevant comments to show how much fun the process had been.

CHAPTER 5. MODERN/POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEMES

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will engage in a hermeneutic interpretation of the interviews I held with stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library. I will focus on stakeholders' comments that seem to indicate modern or postmodern views about various modern/postmodern epistemological themes and I will link the themes to related library issues.

Because, as mentioned earlier, I want to offer an overview of how postmodern thought can illuminate the study of public libraries, I will interpret many different themes rather than focusing deeply on only one or two. I see the themes as a pastiche of postmodern ideas that are linked to one another intertextually, in that they build upon each other, not in a hierarchal way, but rather in a sort of multi-dimensional manner where every theme is linked to every other theme. Perhaps Deleuze's metaphor of the rhizome, which Sedgwick (2001) describes as suggesting that ideas are interrelated in a way similar to blackberries "throwing out tubers, moving through the wood, entwining with one another," is a useful metaphor (p. 137)¹⁹. Although Sedgwick does not seem to have a good grasp of botany, I think he provides a graphic illustration of the interrelatedness of these ideas. I think the rhizomatic nature of the themes will become apparent as the next three chapters unfold.

¹⁹ Although I assume Sedgwick gave a meaningful description of Deleuze's metaphor of the rhizome, his suggestion that blackberries grow from rhizomes or that rhizomes "throw out tubers" seems to suggest a lack of botanical knowledge. Blackberries grow from roots. When stems grow long enough, they arch and trail along the ground eventually growing new roots at the end (Pojar & Mackinnon, 1994, p. 78). Rhizomes and tubers are different types of "bulbs" (Editors of Sunset Books and Sunset Magazine, 1988, p. 185).

The themes and their related library issues addressed in this chapter are

1. Universal truth and reference transactions
2. Character of knowledge and service to school children
3. Validity of beliefs and the Dewey Decimal Classification System
4. Knowing subject and the balanced collection
5. Language and library communication
6. Binaries and the meaning of non-fiction
7. Role of the author and author readings
8. Organization of knowledge and the perfect library
9. Increase in information and the Internet
10. Role of professionals and librarians
11. Original thoughts and intertextuality and the future of libraries.

For each theme, I will quote comments from the interviews and focus groups that seem to relate to the theme's modern or postmodern perspective. I will also give my reasons for interpreting comments as modern or postmodern. Because of space constraints and because all the relevant comments do not seem to be equally richly open to exploration, I will not present all relevant comments. Instead I will focus on the comments that seem most clearly to indicate a modern or postmodern perspective or that appear to illuminate a library issue in an interesting way. Then, in light of the stakeholders' comments, ideas from the literature, and my own experience and pre-understandings of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I will muse briefly about library issues that seem to be related to the theme.

5.2. Universal Truth and Reference Transactions

The modern perception of universal truth emerged in my interview with the second focus group. When I asked the branch heads in the group if they thought of the Regional Library as a place for knowledge and information, they all said they thought this was case. Quentin commented,

“I’ve read quite a bit of Sir Isaac Newton and of course he was one of the greatest scientists that ever lived.... When he discovered certain scientific facts he said, ‘I feel like a small boy on a seashore that discovers a shiny pebble and all around him there’s a sea of truth that lies undiscovered.’ So he was seeking to understand things as they were. He was interested in light. He was interested in gravity. And how these things work and he did understand it to a certain extent. But even down to this day, from what I read, we don’t really fully understand it, but it must be what it is. So I think that kind of knowledge is there waiting to be discovered and it’s up to us to try and figure it out.”

I interpret Quentin’s comments as indicating that he sees universal truth from the modern perspective because his comments seem to be consistent with the modern view that universal truth is somewhere “out there” waiting to be found through scientific research (Rosenau, 1992, p. 80). Since, according to Armstrong (2000), Newton was one of the early Enlightenment thinkers who first adopted modern thought (p. 68), it is not surprising that a quote from him represents the modern view. Quentin’s choice of Newton as an authority suggests that Quentin’s views come from the same direction.

In contrast, a postmodern perception of universal truth seemed to emerge in my interview with Paul. When I asked him whether he thought we discover truth about why people behave in particular ways or whether we create this knowledge in our minds, Paul replied,

“Well human behaviour is not totally amenable to cause and affect. But there is no question that there is some component of that. I think it is true that creative thought can come up with a series of broad behavioural generalizations and series of broad causes related to those. I think there is some ability to analyze. The result of that analysis is new knowledge. I think that’s true in most disciplines—science and non-science, if you wish. But I don’t think for example that there are magic spells out there just waiting for us to discover them. Nor do I think that any

amount of analytical thinking will necessarily create something like that. I think knowledge and information is a combination of both things.”

I interpret Paul’s comments to indicate a somewhat postmodern view of truth because his comment that “human nature is not totally amenable to cause and affect” seems to suggest that we cannot consistently use scientific research to find out the truth about the ways that people behave. His comment that he does not think that “there are magic spells out there waiting for us to discover them” seems to be consistent with a postmodern position that “reject[s] universal truth and dismiss[es] the idea that truth is ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 80).

Postmodern library theorist G. P. Radford (1998) offers an interesting insight into modern and postmodern views of truth when he draws attention to the similarity between the activities of positivist scientists and contemporary librarians. He states,

For both positivism and the library, the dominant metaphor is that of ‘the search.’ In positivist science, the search is for underlying structures that comprise the truth of the natural world. In the library, the search is among structures for a truth that will alleviate a specific ‘information need.’

In other words, for G. P. Radford, modern librarians searching for “true answers” to reference questions parallel positivist scientists searching for scientific truth.

Awareness of the difference between modern and postmodern ideas about truth evokes for me new ways of thinking about the Vancouver Island Regional Library’s reference service. Before I became interested in ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I knew, from my own experience, that most professional librarians believe it is their responsibility to provide correct, complete answers to the reference questions they are asked.

Like librarians in other public libraries, Vancouver Island Regional Library librarians answer questions on a wide range of topics ranging from legal, medical, and consumer information to information on sports, travel, gardening, history, finance,

cooking and so on. Some examples of questions recently answered by librarians at the Nanaimo Harbourfront Branch are

1. Who put the Canadian coins under the ice at the last Winter Olympics?
2. What was the temperature like in Victoria, B.C. on December 31, 1952?
3. Information on the invention of the sextant.
4. Where is Triangle Island?

Although they answer literally thousands of questions every year, librarians never guarantee that the answers they provide are “the truth.” Instead, following library policy, they always cite the source of the information.

Cornelius (1996) suggests that this a common practice in libraries:

Librarians deal with recorded knowledge and supply it to other people.... They are not originators or creators of information; they do not even supply information with the authority of a doctor or a lawyer imparting professional information in their own field.... A librarian cannot be pressed on a point of information: He or she must immediately seek refuge behind the sources²⁰. (p. 65)

Cornelius’s suggestion that citing of sources of information is equivalent to seeking refuge behind sources seems to suggest that he thinks librarians are not able to take responsibility for the answers they provide. Unlike doctors and lawyers, librarians are not experts or “holders of knowledge.” Instead they seek refuge behind the real experts who create or publish the information. From the modern perspective, this is a troubling concept because it seems to suggest that librarians are not professionals. However, as I

²⁰ *Google* (2002) provides a service called *Google answers*. The Terms of Service state: “The Information has not been verified, however, and neither Google nor Researchers represent that it is accurate, correct, complete, reliable, or otherwise valid. Google does not endorse or recommend, and expressly disclaims liability for any product, manufacturer, distributor, service or service provider mentioned in any question, comment or answer.” I think it is interesting that *Google’s* approach is similar to that of most public libraries.

will discuss later in this chapter, to postmodernists, the very concept of professionals seems to be problematic.

In the past, I accepted the fact that public librarians must cite sources because, as generalists, they do not have the in-depth subject expertise to judge whether the answers they find are true. However, I thought that, as professionals, they had adequate reference skills to answer most reference questions correctly. I was therefore concerned when I learned that studies, using such scientific instruments as the *Wisconsin/Ohio Reference Success Measurement Tool*, seemed to indicate that accuracy rates for reference service in public libraries are “troubling.” For example, M. L. Radford (2001) reports that in one American study, “complete, correct answers were given for [only] 29.3% of the questions.” I assumed that a similar study of Vancouver Island Regional Library reference service would likely reveal similar results.

I now think that understanding the difference between modern and postmodern perspectives about truth can evoke a new way of approaching reference service and measuring the accuracy of librarians’ answers to reference questions. I think that the low percentage of “complete, correct answers” found in the studies mentioned by M. L. Radford (2001) were probably based on standards derived from the modern notion that the truth does exist somewhere “out there” waiting to be found.

In my interview with Lou and Bonnie, I asked them about their opinions regarding truth. Bonnie said that she thought there are some things which are clearly true: “The population of a place is an example.” Bonnie’s suggestion that we should be able to find the “correct” answer for “the population of a place” offers a good example of an apparently straightforward reference question which does not have a straightforward answer. In my work as Executive Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I use the populations of municipalities and regional districts within the library area to

determine how to allocate scarce library resources. Financial services staff use these same figures to calculate local tax assessments. Despite our very practical, “bottom-line” need for accurate information, I have had to accept that statisticians cannot provide complete, correct population statistics. Population changes endlessly, as people are born, die, move away, or simply refuse to be counted during the Census²¹. The population figures produced by statisticians are only estimates and are themselves dependent on definitions, conventions, and so on. It seems that true answers to questions about the population of a place do not exist.

Even “the size of a place” can be ambiguous. In the past year, Vancouver Island Regional Library reference librarians located four different area measurements for the province of British Columbia. While I do not know reasons for these differences, I think they may relate to the definition of what actually constitutes British Columbia. For example, what portion of the inlets and straights along the coastline are included in the area of the province? Where exactly are the borders of the province? Differences may also be related to different ways of measuring the mountainous, crumpled geography of the province. Again, it seems that there is no one true answer to this apparently straightforward question.

Not only do I think it can be difficult to find the correct answers to reference questions, I also think it can be difficult to assess when an answer is complete. Given the endless amounts of information now accessible through print and electronic resources, I think the concept of a complete answer to a reference question may also have become meaningless.

²¹ Statistics Canada (2001) notes, “Despite the considerable effort taken to ensure high quality standards throughout each step, the census results are subject to a certain degree of error.”

In chapter seven I will discuss some new criteria, based on postmodern insights about truth and knowledge that may help the Vancouver Island Regional Library evaluate reference service more meaningfully in the future.

5.3. Character of Knowledge and Service to School Children

The modern perception of the character of knowledge seemed to emerge from my interview with Lou and Bonnie when Bonnie commented,

“I feel it is exciting to belong to the library. When I’m in the library, I always feel that I’m surrounded by so much knowledge. In some ways it’s frustrating because I know there isn’t time to even touch the tip of the iceberg but it’s an exciting feeling. It makes me want to stay there longer and just look around and get a taste of all the different books and magazines. I feel like a kid in a candy store. I think it is an exciting place.”

I interpret Bonnie’s comment as being reflective of a modern perspective because it is consistent with McLennan’s (1992) description of the modern view of knowledge “as a privileged unified body of mental ‘thought’... guarded preciously by an elite of scientists, philosophers and academics” (p. 333) and, we might add, by librarians who allow people like Bonnie to access it and taste its sweetness.

A modern view of this theme also emerged from my interview with Marlene.

When I asked her where she thought authors get the ideas for their books, she said,

“I think they mainly get it from their experience. You always hear that you shouldn’t write about what you haven’t experienced. I think that’s what they do, but I hope they haven’t experienced some of the horrible things I’ve read about²².”

I interpret this as being an example of the modern perspective because it is consistent with modern view that knowledge comes from experience or empirical evidence (Seidman, 1998, p. 295). It is also tied to the modern view of the author who at some level must guarantee the truth of their book whether it is fact or fiction.

²² Marlene’s answer is a paraphrase. I failed to tape her interview due to technical error. She approved my reconstruction of the interview.

Library theorists also express views about the character of knowledge. For example, anti-postmodernists Crawford and Gorman (1995) offer, what I see as, a modern perspective when they comment that libraries

are about the preservation, dissemination, and use of recorded knowledge in whatever form it may come... so that humankind may become more knowledgeable; through knowledge reach understanding; and, as an ultimate goal, achieve wisdom. (p. 5)

Postmodern views of knowledge also seemed to emerge from my research. For example, Denise commented,

“I guess you could say that the lady who came to visit me and found out that I made bread this way learned something. Off she went and taught her daughter. We get microwaves and bread making things and vacuum cleaners because we talk to each other. I think we change knowledge by talking about it.”

Denise’s comment seems to indicate a postmodern perspective because it is consistent with a postmodern view that knowledge is constructed by individuals communicating with each other as they interpret reality (Ritzer, 1997, p. 3, Seidman, 1994a, p. 229).

In my interview with Len and Jill, Len, an amateur astronomer, made a comment about scientific knowledge. He said,

“Most of this information [on cosmology] is derived by taking atoms and smashing them in a cyclotron. The people who do that describe it as taking a watch, getting it up to some unbelievable speed, smashing it into a concrete wall and picking up what pieces remain to try to figure out how it works. So you have this object. You don’t know what it is. And that’s how you determine what it is and how it works. Well it’s their best guess.”

I think Len’s comment can be interpreted as being consistent with a postmodern notion that reality “can only be known narrowly and interpretively” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 3) and that postmodern scientific knowledges abandon “absolute standards, universal categories, and grand theories” (Seidman, 1994a, p. 5). In other words, it is possible to see Len as expressing a postmodern view of knowledge in his recognition that our knowledge of cosmology can only ever be as good as cosmologists’ “best guess.” On the other hand, it is possible to interpret Len’s comments as reflecting the modern view

that the truth about the cosmos does exist and that cosmologists will eventually develop sufficiently sophisticated methods to find it.

This modern interpretation of Len's comments is somewhat consistent with my modern interpretation of Quentin's views about Newtonian science. Although both views can be interpreted as being based in science, I think there is a difference between Quentin's Baconian (or Newtonian) scientific truth and Len's contemporary contingent scientific truth. Armstrong (2000) describes this difference. She states that Bacon (1561-1626)

had believed that we could trust our senses absolutely, because they alone could provide us with sound information. He had been convinced that the world was organized around rational principles by an all-knowing God, and that the task of science was not to make wild conjectures but to catalog phenomena and to organize its findings into theories based on facts that were obvious to everyone. (p. 140)

In contrast, contemporary modern scientists, beginning with Darwin and Freud, use a scientific method based on "unproven hypotheses" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 140). They think that by testing a series of hypotheses it is possible to ultimately find the truth²³. On the other hand, contemporary postmodern scientists simply seek to add to knowledge and "prevent consensus" (Bertens, 1995: p. 126). They do not seem to believe that a final answer exists or will ever be found. I think that Len's comments can be interpreted either way.

²³ "Popper distinguishes scientific knowledge from nonscience or metaphysics by his principle of falsifiability.... He claims that science... grows not by mechanical induction of general propositions from accumulated report of particular observations but by the imaginative formulation of hypotheses that are then tested and, unless they elude all efforts to falsify them, revised and replaced. This process may be described as an on-going dialectic of conjecture and refutation" (Dick, 1995, p. 221).

Awareness of the difference between modern and postmodern ideas about the character of knowledge evokes for me ideas about how the Vancouver Island Regional Library could provide access to more knowledge for school children. Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I believed that, as a servant of the public good, the Regional Library must provide a wide range of information for everyone, a so-called balanced collection. While this collection should include items related to the everyday interests of children, it should not include materials to support the school curriculum. That was the role of school libraries. At that time, the Regional Library did purchase materials that could be used to support school projects but this was only because it was thought that these books primarily served the broad informal interests of children. The fact that these books were only borrowed when the students were doing projects did not seem relevant. Nor did the recognition that, because we only bought a small number of items related to school projects, many children could not find anything on the shelves when they came to the Library to do work on their school project. I thought that either the school libraries should provide the materials or diligent parents should help their children find what they needed at the Regional Library. Jill is a good example of such a parent. She commented,

“I’ve trained the kids, ‘You must tell me the very same day that you get the assignment.’ Then we go to the library and look for it. There is a possibility I would request it if I felt there was sufficient time. But most of the time I just try to use what’s there. So it’s very important to come down to the library the first day.”

In light of postmodern perceptions about the character of knowledge I find myself rethinking my position about the provision of curriculum related materials to school children. If knowledge can be seen as narrow and mentally constructed (Ritzer, 1997, p. 3) rather than as “a privileged unified body of mental ‘thought’” (McLennan, 1992, p.

333), perhaps the Regional Library could abandon the belief that it must provide access to a full, complete, unified body of knowledge. Instead, it would be possible for the Library to consider focussing on demands for a smaller range of knowledge, for example, the knowledge that children need to succeed in school.

Other libraries seem to be considering focusing more on the needs of school children. However, I think their decision is based on the modern view of professional judgement rather than on a postmodern view of the character of knowledge. For example the Vancouver Public Library's 2000-2003 Strategic Plan (2000) states their strategic intent:

We will canvass users to identify their changing needs and desires. This will ensure that we build our collections and services in a way that not only reflects the best professional judgement of the staff and Board, but also provides what the citizens of Vancouver want²⁴.

I think that if the Vancouver Island Regional Library were to provide the knowledge children need to succeed in school, based on the understanding that knowledge is narrow and constructed, while the Vancouver Public Library were to provide more children's materials based on "the best professional judgement of the staff," the results would be quite different. The Vancouver Public Library would likely determine that, since professional judgement dictates that the Library must offer a balanced collection, additional materials for school children would have to fit within their balanced collection. In contrast, the Vancouver Island Regional Library could determine that, since all the disparate parts of the collection were narrow and constructed, materials for school children could be out of balance with the rest of the

²⁴ A recent media release from the Canadian Library Association (2002) suggests that these needs are growing: "British Columbia: cuts to school libraries being approved across the province, including the elimination, to date, of at least 80 teacher-librarians in boards outside Vancouver; Comox board to eliminate elementary school library program altogether."

collection. I will discuss these ideas further in chapter seven, when I consider possible pragmatic strategies related to the future of the Vancouver Island Regional Library's collection.

5.4. Validity of Beliefs and the Dewey Decimal Classification System

A modern perspective on the validity of beliefs emerged when I asked Margaret, a First Nations woman, about her views on history. She said,

“For example, what happened to the Pemberton Valley? It went from a population of 75,000 down to 3,500 all because of smallpox.... We know it happened but, because our native history is oral, when you go to court, who does the judge believe? He will take the opinion of the appointed historian because he has papers. They may be handwritten by whoever, but he will take that over the memories of somebody who actually lived during that time.”

I interpret Margaret as speaking from a modern perspective because she seems to be saying that her belief (that the oral tradition provides the best evidence) is more valid than the judge's belief (that an “appointed historian” with “papers” provides the best evidence). Margaret also seems to be suggesting that the judge has taken a modern position because he thinks his belief in the written account is more valid than her belief in the oral tradition. Both these views are consistent with a modern perspective that for a belief to be judged valid there must be factual evidence to support it (McLennan, 1992, p. 231). It is only the basis of the evidence that is in dispute.

This situation reminds me of another postmodern concept known as the end of history. Fukuyama (1989) introduced this concept when he suggested that “liberal, democratic capitalism represents the final stage in the Hegelian evolution of governing regimes, and the fall of the Soviet Union settled the debate” (Postrel 1999). Bertens (1995) offers a different interpretation suggesting that in the postmodern social condition, “the deeper logic, with its key elements of perpetual change, has led to ‘the disappearance of a sense of history’ in the culture, pervasive depthlessness, [and] to a

‘perpetual present’ from which all memory of tradition has disappeared” (p. 162). I suggest that the end of history may be more closely related to our understanding that all history is based on biased, narrow interpretations of biased, narrow records. From a postmodern perspective, no interpretation can ever be considered authoritative.

I think it is interesting that Margaret thinks that written, textual evidence is more likely to be believed by the judge than word of mouth oral evidence. Libraries privilege texts (books, videos, cassettes, and so on) and like Margaret’s judge, by implication, they seem to attribute less value to oral information.

Another strong modern view about the validity of belief emerged when I asked John if he was aware that public libraries think they must show all sides of controversial issues. John said,

“I have a very strong moral attitude about what’s right and what’s wrong. I think the world has become too weak. Society allows too many things, not necessarily to be approved, but to go ahead without disapproval. This is based on the idea that, no matter how ridiculous their beliefs are, everybody has the right to what they want. There are standards that need to be adhered to. The world for a good many decades and centuries had some standards. In general, society believed there was a certain line drawn between what was acceptable and what was unacceptable.”

I interpret this comment as representing the modern perspective because it seems to be based on the view that the “same rules apply everywhere” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 128) and that some rules are better than others.

Despite his strong modern stance regarding the validity of beliefs, John also expressed what I consider to be a postmodern perspective on a related topic. During the interview, I asked him about his views about multiculturalism. He said,

“I guess my related story would be my increased knowledge of the Japanese culture—because of our town’s relationship with a community in Japan. They too have a cultural belief that certain things are acceptable—behaviours of husbands for instance—that we wouldn’t find acceptable or could be grounds for divorce in our country. But in the culture of Japan it seems to be accepted by the women and it hasn’t led to divorce to any great degree in the past. That’s because culturally it

is acceptable. That's a difficult one for us as Westerners to accept because we believe the other way round."

I see this as an expression of a postmodern view because John seems to accept that a belief that is unacceptable in one country may be acceptable in another. The same rules do not apply everywhere. This seems to be consistent with a postmodern view that because "each situation is different and calls for special understanding" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 128), each person's beliefs are valid for them. However, John's modern view seemed to re-emerge when he added,

"Yet those cultures are beginning to change. Divorce in Japan is becoming more of a problem than it was before—because the women are changing. That's something else. A lot of cultures have kept women under lock and key—very limited roles in life, very dependent on the men, ruled by the men. Again it comes back to your Christian beliefs and mine in that the Bible teaches us that marriage is an equal partnership. Yet these other cultures have gone the other way—where it's a ruler and ruled sort of situation proving, I think, at this stage of the game that that's not the way it's supposed to be. But how do you change cultures? I don't know."

A question suggests itself related to the validity of beliefs. Is there a difference between matters of belief that are based in fact (for example belief in the decimation of native populations by introduced diseases) and matters of belief that are based in metaphysics (for example belief in Biblical guidance about marriage)?

From the modern perspective it appears possible to prove the validity of factual matters if empirical evidence exists. However, proof will probably not be possible if the evidence is contradictory. For example, while Margaret believes the oral evidence that smallpox was introduced purposely through "blankets that were infected with smallpox," it appears that the written record says otherwise. There is no way to determine the facts with certainty. From a postmodern perspective, judges will probably make their decisions based in the evidence they are culturally biased toward accepting—the written evidence of the appointed historian and Margaret will probably

make her decision based on the evidence she is culturally biased toward accepting—the oral stories that are part of her culture.

Validity of metaphysical belief seems to be a different matter. From the modern perspective, there seem to be two approaches to metaphysical beliefs. The first is to doubt the validity of matters that are not based in empirical evidence. The second, which will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter, is to attempt to use scientific empirical evidence to prove the truth of a metaphysical matter. From a postmodern perspective, it seems that metaphysical matters are solely a matter of belief. They cannot, and need not, be proven through empirical evidence. All such metaphysical beliefs are valid for the person who holds them.

During the interviews and focus groups, there were a number of comments made about how the modern/postmodern theme validity of beliefs applies to libraries. For example, all the stakeholders who commented on this issue seemed to agree that public libraries should provide a wide range of beliefs. Marlene said,

“I think it would be unethical if the library did not present the different sides of controversial issues. I think the library has a responsibility to provide all sides. The library is there to represent every viewpoint not just promote one viewpoint²⁵.”

Jessica made a similar comment,

“You should be able to go to the library and get information on both sides of issues.”

In the interchange that followed Jessica’s comment, Bert pointed out the practical difficulties, remarking,

“But there are not only two sides to everything. And how does the library present a side that isn’t in a medium that the library has? Should the library document things to make a balance?”

Jessica responded,

²⁵ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

“You could stick a piece of card on the shelf that says, ‘By the way, there is another side to this.’”

Alluding to the controversial issue of clear-cut logging, Evelyn added,

“Cutting down trees can be good.”

Gordon suggested,

“For more information on clear-cut logging contact your nearest logger!”

I think that these comments are interesting because, while they seem to reflect a postmodern perspective that all beliefs are valid, they also suggest the difference between textually based information and oral information mentioned above by Margaret. It seems that both outside and inside libraries, the existence of textual evidence is a significant issue.

The librarians in the first focus group also commented on their belief that the Regional Library should provide information on all sides of an issue. For example,

Alice commented,

“I think another part of this is that, whether you come to me because you want an abortion or you feel quite vehemently that abortions are bad, that you should get the same helpful service. That is part of our training and inculcated into us and I don’t think the clericals have that.”

Katie expressed a more complex view when she said,

“Personally I find it distasteful to protect people’s rights to look at that stuff [soft pornography on the Library’s Internet stations] but you do it. It’s just part of my job.”

On the surface, these comments seem to suggest that it is a librarian’s job to support the validity of all beliefs, including the belief that viewing soft pornography is acceptable.

However, Katie’s comment suggests that she, personally, finds carrying out this part of her job distasteful. She does it because, as a librarian, the neutral stance has been inculcated into her.

I think Katie's separation of herself from her position as librarian is an example of the modernist belief that it is possible for people to maintain a "unitary coherent self" (Seidman, 1994a, p. 6) that is separate from such other things as the job that they do. Postmodernists see the self differently. As Ritzer (1997) points out, "No matter how hard we try to stabilize our identity of wholeness and unity, the social world where we must seek this identity always subverts our endeavor because this order is created by others and escapes our control" (p. 134). In other words, a postmodern view of "the decline of the unitary coherent self" suggests that separation of the whole, complete person from the office they hold is an illusion. The wholeness of our identity is constantly undermined and decentered by the social situations in which we find ourselves. This includes, for Katie, the distasteful situation in which she must allow people to view soft pornography. From a postmodern perspective, this is not separate from her. It is simply a fragment of her endlessly unstable, fragmented identity. I will discuss the issue of pornography in the Regional Library further in chapter six.

There is, as might be expected, evidence in the literature that supports the need for public libraries to present various beliefs. For example, Mollard and Irvine (1999) state "like our universities, public libraries play a special role in society in facilitating the free exchange of ideas and information. That is their *raison d'être*" (p. 3).

At first I found it difficult to decide whether the belief that public libraries should provide information on both sides of controversial issues reflects a postmodern or a modern perspective. On the surface this concept seems to be consistent with a postmodern view that all beliefs are equally valid. However, it also seems to reflect the modern metanarrative of the importance of freedom of expression. In other words, it seems to reflect the modern belief that people's right to say whatever they want to say is so important that we will allow them to say or write all sorts of invalid untruths in order

to uphold one of the “transcendent and universal truths that underpin western civilization and that function to give that civilization objective legitimation” (Bertens, 1995, p. 124)—freedom of speech.

Thinking about the difference between modern and postmodern views about validity of beliefs evoked thoughts for me about Regional Library’s balanced collection. Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I believed that the library’s collection should be balanced. In other words, as a modern librarian, I thought that all points of view on controversial subjects and all types of beliefs, whether scientifically based or not, should be represented.

When I first began to think about the postmodern idea that all beliefs are valid, I thought that the Vancouver Island Regional Library, which provides materials on such topics as feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires and palm reading, that the modern scientific perspective does not consider valid, had taken quite a postmodern stance. However, when I began to see this more as a reflection of the modern metanarrative of freedom of expression than as a reflection of the postmodern perspective that all beliefs are valid, I looked at the way these beliefs are allowed to exist in the Regional Library. Although these materials are in the collection, they are catalogued and classified in the Dewey Decimal Classification (2002) system’s (DDC) third summary classification 133 which includes “Parapsychology & occultism.” This suggests that the cataloguers who decide where these items will be placed in the library do not see these topics as supported by scientific evidence and thus they are not valid in the modern sense. Of course most library users are probably not sufficiently knowledgeable about the DDC to recognize this distinction and may still see the library as upholding the validity of all beliefs.

Despite Katie and Alice's comments that being neutral is part of the job of being a librarian, the hidden structures of the DDC suggest to me that libraries are not value neutral. I think librarians and library theorists should reconsider the emphasis placed on the neutral stance into which librarians have been inculcated. In chapter two of this thesis, I included G. P. Radford and Budd's (1997) and Trosow's (2001) suggestions that the neutral stance has not worked to advantage of libraries. Rather than promoting intellectual freedom, librarians have become "passive and apolitical." I suggest that there is another way of looking at this. While librarians appear to have tried to maintain their professional neutral stance, by providing a cross section of materials and information, they have continued (perhaps in a "passive aggressive way" rather than in a "passive way") to impose their modern, positivist views on the materials they provide—simply by cataloguing these materials according to the modern, positivist structures of the DDC. Yes, public libraries provide feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires and palm reading but, at least the librarian knows, those beliefs are not really valid. In chapter seven I will discuss these issues further and suggest possible pragmatic strategies for the Vancouver Island Regional Library's future.

5.5. Knowing Subject and the Balanced Collection

The modern view of the knowing subject emerged in the second focus group when Quentin commented,

"I think the other thing with the use of the Internet is that people are becoming more aware that you have to be very selective in what to accept off the Internet. Because a lot of times people think, 'Oh the information is out there—it must be right' but 90% of what is on there is baloney. So this is where the library can be a big help because librarians know the most reputable websites, the ones that can be the most accurate. So they can refer people to those sites or get the information from those sites so, as much as possible, people are at least getting accurate information."

I interpret this as being a modern view because the phrases “people are becoming more aware that you have to be very selective in what you accept off the Internet” and “librarians know the most reputable websites” suggest that Internet users and librarians can be the knowing “subject in the midst of mere objects” (Seidman, 1994a, p. 5).

I thought the modern perspective of this theme emerged in a slightly different way when Denise said,

“I want to remind you about when I graduated from high school in 1966. The schoolteacher said that, in B.C. in 2000, people were going to suffer badly. They were going to lose their economy and they were not going to be skilled. She told us about all the new equipment that was going to be around. She told us not to be secretaries or welders. Secretaries will be displaced by people speaking into a machine and then the letter will be typed. She said that welders wouldn’t be welding anymore because someone would just push the button and an electronic welder would weld. She asked us to go into industries where people still love people. She thought the service industry was the best.”

I interpret this as suggesting the modern perspective because the teacher seemed to have “God’s eye point of view” into the future (Seidman, 1994a, p. 5).

Len also seemed to express a modern view of the knowing subject when he said,

“It’s beyond me to establish what the [library’s] goals and objectives are whether it’s to service the trashy novel set or the serious reading set. It may be that if you’re looking for information about what kind of reading material and information you should carry, you should ask that kind of specific question to a large enough sample of the population and analyze that information to find out what people want. Before you can establish what the library should carry, the library has to have some kind of goals as to what it wants to provide as a service and how large a volume it wants to have of books and people coming through.”

I interpret this as indicating a modern perspective because it seems to suggest positivist researchers’ belief that if they, as knowing subjects, follow the correct methodology they can discover valid, reliable scientific and social scientific truths (Madison, 1990, p. x).

Some library theorists also comment about the library in terms of the modern perspective of the knowing subject. For example, Budd (1995), who often speaks from a postmodern perspective, states,

At its core the library exists to collect, organize, and provide access to information. This mission necessitates understanding what exists, selecting in some way a subset of the totality of information, imposing some order on that information, and serving a mediator function between the user and both the information available and the library's structure. (p. 306)

I interpret Budd's view as being modern in at least three senses. When he says that the librarian must understand what exists he seems to be indicating a positivist view that there is a reality, people are distinct from this reality, and can know about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). When he says that the librarian must impose order on these materials, he seems to be describing the librarian as having a "God's eye view" and ability to impose order, in other words, the knowing subject. The modern view of the elite, authoritative knower who guards "a privileged unified body of mental 'thought' which exists in the collective Mind" (McLennan, 1992, p. 333) also seems to be at play in Budd's comment.

In contrast, library theorist G. P. Radford (1998) appears to criticize librarians' modern perspective when he compares the search in positivist science to a librarian's positivist search for information in the library. He states,

In both cases, the structure to be discovered/searched is preordained, either by a supreme being or by a librarian. Indeed, the image of the "librarian-god" is common in the literary portrayal of the library.

In other words, it seems that for G. P. Radford, modern librarians, viewing reality from a unified, singular perspective, think of themselves as having a "God's eye point of view" and are, thus, good examples of knowing subjects.

A postmodern view of this modern/postmodern theme emerged in the first focus group's discussion about the possibility of librarians being able to select materials to create a balanced collection. Beth commented,

“We come from our own cultural perspective so what we would perceive as being a balance on a certain subject from another person's cultural point of view might be very skewed towards that one point of view.”

Katie replied,

“I agree with all that and I still think we need to strive toward it [a balanced collection] to the best of our ability. We still have to be as open-minded as we can, to be aware of our own biases as much as we can, and to realize that we will end up with a skewed collection. You know—acknowledge that but not say, ‘OK then I'll just buy what I like.’”

Beth concluded,

“I think the librarians doing the selecting probably have to work very hard not to pay attention too much to their own personal biases. I think that is a very difficult thing.”

I interpret Beth and even Katie's comments as being postmodern because they both seem to recognize that we are all rooted in our own experiences and are part of what we observe and know. However, their perspective can also be seen to be modern since they seem to believe that librarians must act as if they were not biased. In other words, despite their acknowledged biases, librarians should try to behave like the modern knowing subject and to stand apart from their own experiences, opinions and knowledge.

Later in the discussion Katie suggested that unbiased selection has not always been practiced. She said,

“And the other thing is, back to the bias of selecting librarians, because I saw an eyebrow somewhere when I said that some librarians consciously go with their biases. I think they do because most librarians are very ethical and we have people who think they know best. I'm not necessarily saying within VIRL. Maybe, maybe not, but historically there have been lots of selecting librarians—they choose what's *good* for people. Not what people want to read. *Good* for people according to *their* particular point of view—right?”

In response to my question of whether she thought this is still going on, she replied,

“Yes. And maybe it’s more subtle now—maybe it’s more hidden but, oh yes, [for example, there are] formats or genres or things that are considered, you know, not quite as acceptable.”

Before I became interested in how postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I believed that selecting librarians could and must overcome their personal biases and, adopting the neutral stance, select materials to create the balanced collection mentioned above. Awareness of the postmodern concept of the knowing subject has allowed me to look at selecting librarians’ biases differently. In chapter seven, I will further discuss the neutral stance and recommend that librarians abandon this unrealistic position.

5.6. Language and Library Communication

I raised the issue of language in four focus groups and in two interviews. A modern view of language seemed to emerge in the fourth focus group when Bert said,

“If you’re trying to get across ideas that are complex, obviously it’s not going to be straightforward. But if it’s really heavy and difficult to read and understand, there’s always a way to make it simpler and easier to understand. Writing in a straightforward way doesn’t decrease the value or the complexity of what you’re trying to get across. Complexity for complexity’s sake isn’t a good thing. Who’s to say that just because it’s hard to understand that it’s good? But there are a lot of people who think it is important to make it hard to understand.... When it’s being presented to a general audience it should be easy to understand. Otherwise, what’s the use of writing it?”

I interpret Bert’s comment as indicating a modern view because he seems to suggest that people have the choice to make language work and to express complex thoughts in such a way that they are easy to understand.

The modern view of language also seemed to emerge in the first focus group when the librarians talked about, what they saw as, the inaccurate use of library jargon. Alice said,

“I think in our library system people use ‘book collection’ to mean all formats. We do that when we’re talking among ourselves. People say ‘book collection.’ They don’t mean ‘book collection’. They actually mean the ‘library collection.’ I made quite a concerted effort for a number of years to try and move away from that but I haven’t noticed much movement. People call it a ‘book delivery’ or a ‘book pull’. But it’s not. Actually librarians come in who are just looking for videos who’ll say that they’re here on a ‘book pull’.... Even ‘collections’ has a different meaning. When Mark was introduced to me, I was introduced as the person in Collections. He thought the department was for collecting money.”

Katie added,

“And ‘circulation’ to an architect often means ‘people flow’. So you can get into big troubles planning with an architect whose thinking ‘people flow’ when you’re thinking ‘check-in and check-out.’”

I interpret these comments as modern because they seem to indicate that Alice and Katie believe that if language were used correctly it could express truth. For example, if people would use the accurate term library collection, instead of the inaccurate term book collection, we would all understand each other better. If we used the right terms, language would work.

Another example of the modern view of language emerged in the second focus group when Eleanor talked about her problem finding a book about a particular type of sewing for a library customer. In answer to my question about problems with language, Eleanor said,

“We recently had one. It was a lady wanting to make plus-size clothes. And Pat and I, it was unbelievable, we were finally able to get it but we had to go through Reference [the Reference Department] to get it. It’s under ‘Costumes dash something else dash fat.’ There’s five headings before you finally get the heading. But to begin with, it’s not a costume, is it? Just because you’re overweight and you want to sew your clothes doesn’t make it a costume. Well it’s like cooking—‘Cookery’! We all know ‘Cookery dash Italian,’ but Joe Blow isn’t going to know to type in ‘Cookery.’”

Again, I interpret Eleanor as having a modern view because her comment seems to indicate that she thinks that language should work. I find this example particularly interesting because it suggests that the language used in library subject headings do not work even for experienced library staff. Eleanor has worked in libraries for twenty years

and knew that the subject heading for cooking is *cookery*. She did not know that the subject heading for sewing clothing is *costumes*. In fact, she took the somewhat archaic use of the word to be insulting to people of above average weight.

I tried to encourage Paul to consider language as shaping our understanding of the social world by asking him whether he thought language influences thinking. If this had been done by a researcher working from a modernist, positivist perspective, it would have been considered tampering with the data. However it is acceptable for researchers working from a postmodern, constructivist research tradition, since in this tradition researchers actively engage their participants in discussion to try to achieve new understandings. Paul's reply seemed to move from the modern view to a postmodern view but ended up expressing the modern perspective. He said,

“My initial reaction is that I don't really have an opinion on that but if I did I would probably think no. Well, maybe that's not entirely true. Unless you have language to describe something it's very difficult to think in an analytical way about it because you can't communicate your thought and that means your thinking is limited to internal generalizations. You never get to share it and build on it through debate or whatever. So to some extent that must happen. In a modern sense our language is relatively evolved. I don't think it does influence our thinking.”

I think it is interesting that Paul seemed to be able to see the postmodern view but chose to retain his modern perspective.

The postmodern view that language shapes “meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 29) did not come out directly in the interviews and focus groups but I think it is implicit in much of what was said. For example, when I asked the first focus group if they remembered where we had catalogued donated books on creation science, Alice said,

“We put them in the *correct* [my italics] place for cataloguing. Where is the *correct* [my italics] place for cataloguing? We didn't put them necessarily where the people wanted them to be. The area they wanted was not LC or Dewey's way

of cataloguing and we catalogued *in the place that was the right place to put them* [my italics]. I'm damned if I remember exactly where it was."

Alice's comment seems to indicate that the way Alice thinks about cataloguing is different from the way the people donating the materials think about cataloguing. For Alice, cataloguing must be "correct" and based in "LC or Dewey." For the donors, the idea of a correct place appears to be irrelevant. I suggest that Alice's thinking is shaped by the words "the correct place." This phrase emphasizes the view that there is only one correct place to catalogue these items. If Alice had used a different word, such as "a useful place," I think her thinking would have been different. For example, Alice could have said,

"We put them in *a useful place* [my italics] for cataloguing. Where is *a useful place* [my italics] for cataloguing? We didn't put them necessarily where the people wanted them to be. The area they wanted was not LC or Dewey's way of cataloguing and we catalogued *in a useful place to put them* [my italics]. I'm damned if I remember exactly where it was."

If Alice had used this type of language, her thinking about cataloguing would have been quite different. Rather than seeing the process of cataloguing as a rigid system that must be correctly adhered to, she might have seen the process as a pragmatic system that can be modified to suit practical considerations. In other words, she might have agreed to catalogue the creation science books in the place that the donors thought would be useful, perhaps with materials on science rather than with materials on religion.

The postmodern view that language does not work as modernists think it should emerged in focus group four when Jessica drew attention to the failure of language under extreme circumstances. She commented,

"There was a moment on the September 11 thing when [Canadian television reporter] Peter Mansbridge said, 'I don't know why I'm sitting here talking. You can see it and what you see is a thousand times more than I can say.'"

I interpret this comment to indicate a postmodern viewpoint because it is consistent with a postmodern idea that language limits what we can say. In the case of the September 11

attacks, I assume that Peter Mansbridge was unable to think about or comment on the event within the usual language conventions of the media. Perhaps the situation was so unbelievable that he did not know how to think about it. He could not find language to construct a meaningful description of what had occurred.

Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I assumed that the language used in most Library of Congress subject headings worked and that those that were hard to identify were examples of the failure of subject heading specialists to choose the right words or examples of outdated headings that had not been revised. In other words, I would have agreed with Eleanor that costuming was rather a poor choice of words for a subject heading regarding sewing clothing for larger women. I would also have suggested selecting more appropriate words and, using some kind of global cataloguing command, changing the subject heading, costuming, to the more appropriate term.

Olson (2001) offers new insights:

Naming information is the special business of librarians and information professionals.... To achieve subject access, representations of documents having the same or a similar subject are gathered within the context of a catalog or index. Gathering the items depends upon always naming a topic in the same way—hence the justification of controlled vocabulary: it allows for one-stop shopping.

Olsen suggests that, while the use of controlled vocabulary and the various conventions used by the Dewey Decimal Classification system and Library of Congress subject headings group mainstream subjects together, it also disperses information about marginalized groups “in a diaspora of little ghettos” which are difficult to find. Olson suggests, what she calls, “a redemptive technology” of allowing more than one authoritative heading for a topic. I agree with this suggestion as I think it would make it somewhat easier to find items in the Library’s catalogue if there were more choices. However, I also think that the very concept of a “controlled vocabulary” for subject

headings needs to be reconsidered in light of postmodern notions that language does not work the way we think it does.

5.7. Binaries and the Meaning of Non-Fiction

There seem to be many binary word pairs that apply to public libraries. When I planned the first focus group I thought that doing an exercise related to binaries might be a good warm-up. I explained to the group the idea that the meaning of each word in a binary pair influences the meaning of the other word. I asked the librarians to think of partner words for various library related words. I tried to illustrate how the meaning changed when different partner words were used. Here is the transcript of that part of the focus group:

Penny: “So, ‘fiction.’ What would the binary be?”
Alice: “The knee jerk reaction for somebody in libraries is ‘non-fiction.’”
Penny: “Here’s another one you’ll do like that: ‘Check-in.’”
Someone: “Check-out.”
Penny: “How about ‘user’?”
Someone: “Non-user.”
Penny: “OK, those were the ones I was expecting. How about ‘professional’?”
Beth: “Non-professional.”
Penny: “Non-professional. Anything else?”
Isabel: “Clerical.”
Alice: “We’re in the library context.”
Penny: “That’s right. So ‘non-professional’ and ‘clerical’—kind of mean the same thing?”
Isabel: “Um hum.”
Penny: “What about ‘unprofessional?’”
Beth: “That doesn’t mean the same thing.”
Penny: “Do you think you could have a ‘non-professional’ who was ‘professional’ in the sense of the other binary?”
Beth: “Yes, absolutely.”
Penny: “And the other way round. A ‘professional’ who was ‘unprofessional?’”
Beth: “Oh yes.”....
Penny: “So we could try one other one. It’s ‘popular’ in a library context.”
Isabel: “Unpopular.”
Penny: “‘Unpopular’ or?”
Alice: “Academic.”
Penny: “So again, is something that is academic unpopular?”
Beth: “Sometimes.”
Penny: “Not necessarily. But do we sort of think that way?”
Isabel: “In a public library setting, yes.”

Katie: “Another one that comes to my mind is ‘literary.’”

Penny: “So again do we think of ‘literary’ as being ‘unpopular’ because it is the other opposite of ‘popular?’”

Isabel: “Usually.”

I think that, as a result of the exercise, the librarians gained a postmodern view of binaries. I also think that their insights into the words that can pair with professional and popular are interesting.

Len and Jill are a married couple who both use the Vancouver Island Regional Library but in different ways. Len carefully reads a few astronomy books each year. Jill regularly reads a great deal of fiction. Len described their use of the library using his own personal binaries. He said,

“Our uses are completely different. Fiction/non-fiction. Large volume/small volume. Using all the time/ using much less frequently. We have totally different purposes.”

Jill added,

“But the use we both make is very much hobby and recreation driven. I read to relax and enjoy myself and Len reads for a very specific purpose.”

Len replied,

“Fantasy/reality.”

I interpret Len’s use of binaries to reflect a modern perspective. This is because there is no evidence that he saw them as anything other than opposites. I think it is interesting that he brought up the pair fiction and non-fiction which was also part of the librarian exercise.

I would like to focus on that binary briefly. Public libraries’ changing views about fiction and non-fiction over the years is interesting. Nunberg (1998) and Berriman (1998, p. 3) say that, in the 1850s when public libraries were first established in the English speaking world, they were seen as educational institutions. According to Williams (1988) “light” reading was included because people believed that “such books

are necessary at the earliest stage of self-education.” By the end of 19th century, librarians had begun to realize that most people who enjoy “light” reading do not move on to reading works with “educational” value. Rather, they continue to read “light” materials. Librarians came to believe that libraries should provide “light” fiction, not to elevate taste, but because the tax-paying public demanded it (p. 9). During the first quarter of the 20th century, public libraries continued to be seen as providing education and recreation. Librarians emphasized the educational role of libraries because they held the modernist view that the public library was a tool of “universal forces of creative evolution... impelling civilization to higher levels” (p. 26). The public, on the other hand, continued to use the public library largely for entertainment (p. 34). Murison (1971) states that, by the middle of the 20th century, public libraries had ceased to be concerned about whether their purpose was primarily educational or primarily recreational and were providing both types of service (p. 88). In 1948, a long awaited report, the *Public Library Inquiry*, which had been funded by the Carnegie Foundation, recommended that public libraries should cease providing light reading and focus on providing high quality, authoritative and reliable materials to the small group of educated users who were its natural audience. The *Public Library Inquiry* had no real influence on public libraries, which ignored this report and continued as before (Williams, 1988, pp. 67-69). Since that time, public libraries have continued to provide both fiction and non-fiction and the Vancouver Island Regional Library, like most public libraries, provide both types of materials today.

Before I became interested in postmodern thought, I saw fiction and non-fiction as a useful way of grouping library materials. When I was a children’s librarian, I used to tell children that fiction was “not true” and non-fiction was “true.” It wasn’t until later that I began to wonder why feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, palm reading, and so

on, were in the “true” non-fiction section while historical fiction and other well researched novels, that were at least partially “true,” were included in the “not true” fiction section.

Postmodernists seem to find this binary problematic for a different reason.

Seidman (1994a) comments that for postmodernists,

The distinctions between fact and fiction are ... softened because both are seen as the products of, and sources for, communicative actions; both are viewed as representations of reality that also represent various groups, interests, ideologies, and historical impositions. (p. 230)

Ritzer (1997) makes a similar point when he talks about Baudrillard’s view that,

The widespread existence of simulations is a major reason for the erosion of the distinction between the real and the imaginary, the true and the false. It is increasingly difficult to distinguish the real from the fake; every contemporary event is a mixture of the real and the imaginary. (p. 95)

In other words, for postmodernists the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not relevant because both are representations and both are created.

I think the “fiction/non-fiction” binary may be causing more confusion than clarity for people looking at it from both modern and postmodern perspectives. In chapter seven, I suggest that perhaps libraries could move away from using these two categories and simply use Dewey Decimal Classification system order since it includes schedules for literature. In light of the difficulties in language, mentioned above, it might also be helpful to customers if the Regional Library began to use the type of common language signage and layout used by large bookstores. I think they would be more useful to library customers than the confusing “truth status signifiers” known as fiction and non-fiction.

5.8. Role of the Author and Author Readings

Some of the stakeholders made comments that suggest they have a modern view of the role of the author. For example, during the second focus group Quentin recalled a childhood experience of going to an author reading,

“I can remember going to one... as a young boy and hearing somebody read poetry. And, you know, young boys and poetry aren't that synonymous. But it really impressed me—the feeling and just everything about this poetry because when he read it there was such feeling in it. I mean it just made it live. So you can sit down and read a poem, ‘blah de de blah de de blah,’ and it doesn't have any feeling to it. But somebody reads you poetry properly, that is suitable for your age and so on, which this no doubt was, it just had a tremendous impact and I remembered it all my life. So who knows their book better than the author? So when he reads it, he makes the book come to life and that promotes interest in reading and just promotes so much good.”

I think Quentin's view is an example of the modern perspective about authors because he suggests that authors are most knowledgeable about their own work.

The modern perspective also seems to emerge in Bonnie's comments on *Angela's Ashes* (McCourt, 1996),

“It was one of our book club books. Most people really thought it was a great book. We were fascinated to meet the author because it was his life.”

I interpret this comment as reflecting the modern perspective because it suggests that, to really understand the work of an author, one needs to understand the author's personality.

Other stakeholders express what I take to be postmodern views of the role of the author. I asked some stakeholders whether readers could get things from books that the author did not intend. Marlene replied,

“Readers get things out of books from their own perspective. We all have our own biases and life experience. It could be different from what the author intended. You know how people take literature courses to try to analyze books. They try to find out what the author really meant. They may find something but I don't think it's necessarily what the author meant. I think some books have deep messages in

them but that's not the way I read them. I'm more interested in the story than in the deep philosophical messages²⁶."

I interpret this comment as postmodern because it suggests that "meaning does not inhere in the text; it resides in the interaction between the text and reader" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 25).

Evelyn also commented on the irrelevance of trying to find out what the authors really mean in their works. She said,

"On Oprah's Book Club thing, they're always talking to authors and asking them things like, 'What did you mean when this happened?' But I don't think it matters what the author meant."

I interpret Evelyn's comments as postmodern because she seems to dethrone the author and, by implication, empower the reader.

Len also expressed, what I think is a postmodern view of the role of the author. He said,

"I initially thought I would answer that they have special knowledge but I wouldn't say that now. They may have special knowledge, but I think they have taken what they have studied and they have synthesized it. I remember when I wrote my thesis at the university. You know what it's like. You start with nothing. You come up with a problem. What you do is you create something that didn't exist before. There may not be a lot of new knowledge but you are taking what exists and synthesizing it in a new way. That means something. You know that. You know what you felt like when you wrote your bachelors and then your masters—what it meant and how you felt when you did it. That's synthesis at whole new level. You can tell when somebody has synthesized something well because it comes across to the reader in such a lucid fashion. It's so simple and clear."

I interpret Len's comments as being postmodern because he seems to recognize that nothing is "really original in the sense of being the exclusive work of a particular author; everything is a copy, a simulacrum" (Rosenau, 1992, p. 29). I will look at this concept in more detail in the next section.

²⁶ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

Anti-postmodern library writer Wisner (2000) also comments on the change in the role of the author. He states,

In the domain of literary criticism, deconstruction enjoys a current vogue in America—a school which, building upon the proved imprecision of language, discovers subtle contradictions within the “text,” revelatory of contradictions within the intentions of the author. Then, in comical displacement of the author, the newly valorized critic (as a so-called “imperial reader”) then “deconstructs” the text to reveal its actual meaning, which turns out to be nothing. It can’t be anything because any underpinnings of meaning have been cut out from under the text by the deconstructive process.... The author’s misguided assumptions were not an ascent to truth.... but merely a revelation of his or her race, class, economic status and gender. (p. 78)

I think Wisner’s description of the death of the author and rise of the imperial reader is a caricature of postmodernism rather than an honest description. Postmodernists do not suggest that the process of deconstruction results in nothing. Rather they suggest that through deconstruction other layers of meaning are clarified. While postmodernists do not see authors ascending to truth, they do see, in an author’s work, a multiplicity of meanings arising from the author’s biases and situation and from the other texts which are at play in every author’s work.

Thinking about the role of the author suggests thoughts about library author readings. Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently I thought author readings were aimed at a small elite group of library users and that, since public libraries should promote the public good by providing service for the entire community, author readings should not be provided. I realize that this was an unusual stance for a public library director since most public libraries seem to offer author readings as a way of promoting the library. However, it was the outcome of a careful, modern planning process and seemed to me to be valid.

However, many of the Vancouver Island Regional Library staff seem to think the Regional Library should hold author readings. For example in the second focus group Flo, a branch head, commented,

“We had Edith Iglauer quite a long time ago and she was just wonderful. I can’t remember if the library was open that night or not but we had gotten some chairs.... Having read the book and then having listened to her and the experiences that she had gone through in the book²⁷, it sort of added another dimension to it.”

In a similar vein, Eleanor, another branch head, replied,

“We got the lady—I always get her name wrong—the lady that was in the famous picture from Vietnam²⁸.... Anyhow she came but we had a week’s notice and it wasn’t enough. There were so many people afterwards that were almost angry with us that there hadn’t been more notice: ‘Why didn’t you tell us?’ I didn’t even make a Saturday announcement, it was that fast.... And even then we had about twenty-five people. But I think we could have filled the place. We featured her books for weeks afterwards and every time you put them on the display shelf they were gone. And people would say, ‘I really wish I’d known.’”

Quentin, also a branch head, summed it up,

“We have storytimes for little kids, preschoolers, but kids that are in Grade Seven and Eight can enjoy being read to immensely and adults also. How many adults enjoy going to an author reading? Lots. So I think author readings and libraries should be synonymous.”

I think that author readings appeal most strongly to people who hold a modern view of authors, people who think that if they have heard an author speak about a work they understand that work better. For authors who think the same way, author readings are probably pleasurable events. In contrast, a truly postmodern author would probably prefer to have their work “stand on its own” and allow readers to make their own interpretation. Recently the Regional Library changed its policy and we now are offering author readings again. Even though this does not reflect my postmodern view

²⁷ The book was *Fishing with John*. I also heard Edith Iglauer read from it at an author reading held in a book store.

²⁸ The person referred to is Phan Thi Kim Phuc (Buerkle, 2000).

about author readings, librarians and interested customers seem to think this is a good decision.

5.9. Organization of Knowledge and the Perfect Library

As mentioned above, many public libraries, including the Vancouver Island Regional Library, use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system to organize materials. According to the DDC website (2002), “In the DDC, basic classes are organized by disciplines or fields of study.” In other words, the DDC reflects the modern view of the organization of knowledge which tends “to put boundaries between such things as academic disciplines” (Ritzer, 1997, p. 9). In contrast, Chapters (a large Canadian bookstore chain) arranges their materials into broad popular categories such as Travel, Cooking, Humour, Computers, etc. To learn about stakeholders’ views about the organization of knowledge, I asked them what they thought about the DDC and Chapters. I interpreted comments in favour of the DDC and against Chapters as being somewhat reflective of a modern view. I interpreted comments in favour of Chapters and against the DDC as being somewhat reflective of a postmodern view.

Lou seemed to be impressed by the way the DDC works. He commented,

“I’m always amazed about how it [the DDC] all works out. I’m just absolutely in awe when I go into libraries and I can find the book based on those last couple of numbers. Everything has to be lined up just right and then you’ve got it.”

Since Lou seems to be in favour of the DDC, I interpret his view of the organization of knowledge as being modern.

Jill also seemed to think the DDC serves her needs. When I asked her how she thought the DDC works, he said,

“I know that things are organized from 100 up to 900 and I know that the reference ones are past the 100 section. That’s what I know. When I look up the subject, such as Austria for my daughter’s school project, I write down the number. I know that generally speaking when I go to that section I’m going to find other books on countries. Anyway, the last time I did that, we didn’t find any

books on Austria, but we found some great books on other countries so we took one out instead. I don't know what the decimal points mean other than there's obviously other books in the same number. So if it's 949.046, in the 046 there will be other books similar to the one I'm looking for."

It is interesting that, even as a person who uses the library frequently, Jill had minimal knowledge of how the DDC works. However she was able to use it effectively. Since Jill seemed to think the DDC works well, I interpreted her view as being from the modern perspective.

Marlene seemed not to like the way Chapters organizes materials. She said,

"I don't really like the way Chapters organizes information. It's hard to find the things you want by the headings they use—so I generally ask a clerk. Then, when I find what I want I wonder why they put it under that heading. I like the way the library organizes things by the Dewey Decimal System better. It's easier to use²⁹."

I interpret Marlene's as seeing the organization of knowledge from the modern perspective.

Jessica also found the way Chapters organizes their materials difficult to use and preferred the library. She said,

"I like the library better. In Chapters you have the idea that the section you're looking through may include more things than just, for example 'Humour.' Plus there's a lot of fiction that is also humourous but it's not in the 'Humour' section. I think Chapters is actually a very hard store to browse partly because of all the displays. It's not organized well enough that you can just find what you want."

Interestingly, the DDC does not deal with the classification of humourous fiction any differently than Chapters. I think that the broad subject categories that Chapters uses to organize its materials may lead to the expectation that humourous fiction will be found in the Humour section. This appears to be a negative aspect of organizing the collection by broad genre categories.

²⁹ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

In contrast Denise, an entrepreneur, said she disliked the way the Regional Library organizes materials and preferred Chapters. Regarding the library's organization, she commented,

"I already told you that putting the books on the shelf, as you do now, is too boring. So why can't someone say, 'Let's do something entirely different.' You've got them coded now like grocery store codes or drugstore codes—so you could code them and place them in different places in the library."

Regarding Chapters' organization, she commented,

"I do love Chapters. You'll find me in Chapters quite a bit and I love the coffee bar and I love the way the books are. I love the way I can go from one subject to the next subject. I can easily see what the subjects are. I love the chairs."

I interpret Denise to have a postmodern view of the organization of knowledge because she seems not to be interested or impressed by the rigorous modern principles which differentiate the disciplines.

Margaret, an infrequent user of the Library, also seemed to prefer the way that Chapters organizes materials compared to the DDC, which she did not understand. She commented,

"I don't feel familiar with how the library system really works. When I first went through the doors to look up information I really felt inadequate in how to find my material. I think that was because, when you first go through the door, you have the desk to left and then ahead are rows and rows of books. But I don't know where the information I'm interested in is, whether it's medical, physical, or if I want to get a book just to read. So I go up and down the aisles trying to find what I want. I love looking at books but my time is precious. I feel really inadequate compared to somebody who goes to the library every day. You can tell who is a frequent user of the library and one who isn't because we really stand out like a sore thumb. It's like awww?... When I go to the desk and say, 'Could you please tell me where I could get a book by Dr. Shapiro on such and such,' they say, 'Go and look over by the Reference Desk.' That's like telling me go to another foreign country and try to figure out what system the library uses for where things are. I don't know if they go by the author or by the number of the book. Again I have to start from square one. I feel like I'm going back to when I first started using the library in the school system."

When I asked Margaret whether Chapters was any easier, she answered,

"I know where I'm looking when I'm in Chapters."

Beth, a librarian, appears to have an interesting perspective on the DDC and on Chapters. About the DDC, she said,

“The Dewey scale was devised a very long time ago and it isn’t growing very well. So you have sections of the Dewey Classification scheme that are trying to absorb new areas of knowledge and understanding that didn’t exist when Dewey devised the scale. The obvious one is anything to do with computers, which is an enormous area now but it’s been compressed into a very small range of numbers and it’s very difficult to deal with those. A lot of new concepts are coming out which were not dreamed up in Dewey’s day. So the scheme doesn’t work very well for classifying knowledge.”

About Chapters, she said,

“The material is not arranged in any particularly predictable way but it is clearly labelled. And nobody seems to care. I know I don’t when I go into a bookstore—that within a subject the books are quite random. Sometimes there is some kind of alphabetical order or there may be group collections, like all the karate books are together, but they may not be arranged in any order in that section. But then there aren’t that many titles.... I quite like being able to rummage aimlessly and just maybe tripping across something that I would not otherwise have found. I don’t care that much in a bookstore. I’m not expecting anything else.”

I’m not sure whether to interpret Beth as having a postmodern view or a modern view.

Her concern that the DDC does not classify knowledge very well seems to imply a modern view that knowledge can be classified and we just need a better system. Her comment that Chapters’ way of grouping items works for her seems to imply a postmodern view that classifying knowledge correctly is not a concern. Perhaps rather than interpreting Beth’s view as modern or postmodern, it would be better summed up as pragmatic. She seems to want the knowledge organization system, whichever it is, to work.

This reminds me that stakeholders’ comments cannot always be neatly characterized as modern or postmodern. Sometimes the same person’s comments seem to suggest that they have both modern and postmodern views on the same subject. In other words, sometimes the modern/postmodern binary itself does not work, at least

when attached to individuals as unitary rational subjects. Perhaps this is an indication of how much the different sides of the themes are intertwined. More likely, it indicates that people's modes of thinking are complex and inconsistent. Of course, there is also the possibility that my interpretation has nothing to do with what the stakeholders were trying to say. The question also arises; do the stakeholders' comments bear any relationship to what they actually do in practice? I think it is useful to keep these questions in mind and not fall into the modern perspective that this hermeneutic interpretation is trying to find the truth. It is only my interpretation of stakeholders' comments supported by ideas from the literature and my own preunderstandings.

Some of the branch heads indicated that they found the DDC "odd." The following inter-change occurred when I asked the third focus group about it:

Deidre: "The Dewey Decimal System is so odd."

Nancy: "That's right. You have to go several different places."

Deidre: "Oh that one's over here! No, it's over here! And you have to go all over. And it's like 'Where is she going?'"

I think Deidre was referring to the DDC's use of disciplines rather than broad subject categories as its basic organizing principle. As the DDC (2002) webpage states,

A subject may appear in more than one discipline. For example, "clothing" has aspects that fall under several disciplines. The psychological influence of clothing belongs in 155.95 as part of the discipline of psychology; customs associated with clothing belong in 391 as part of the discipline of customs; and clothing in the sense of fashion design belongs in 746.92 as part of the discipline of the arts.

I think that the DDC's basis in the disciplines makes it difficult for customers to use and is puzzling to some library staff.

Library theorists Hjørland and Albrechtsen (1999) comment on the disciplinary basis of the DDC, stating,

The most important feature of the DDC is—again according to our analysis—that it scatters subjects by discipline, which we see as an expression of a pragmatic, historicist, and realistic philosophy of knowledge, because disciplines are

historically developed structures which determine the way in which subjects are interpreted and organized. (p. 133)

They also state,

We agree that classification should reflect new developments both regarding interdisciplinary areas and regarding the identities in and relations between disciplines. Disciplines are not static or homogeneous. There is no neutral way to do this. A classification always reflects some values, priorities and views of what is classified and what goals the classification is intended to support. (p. 134)

I interpret Hjørland and Albrechtsen as having, like Beth, a pragmatic view of the organization of knowledge and, as a moderate postmodernist, accept that a truly neutral way of organizing knowledge is an impossibility.

Library theorist Miksa (1998) provides further insights into the difference between modern and postmodern views of classification. Commenting about librarians' modern approach, he states,

In the more recent period (since the 1950s), one finds library classification researchers not only connecting the complex phenomenon of the universe of knowledge to specialists as users of information, especially specialists as scientists, engineers, and other scholars, but also identifying themselves with those same users—that is, with scientists, engineers, and scholars. In the process they have come to describe their work not merely as the classification of the sciences, but also, and more specifically, as the act of scientific classification, with appropriate emphasis on the intellectual weightiness of the endeavor and the importance of correct “scientific” methodology. (p. 76)

Miksa also offers insights into postmodern epistemology and library classification systems:

First, the post-modern point of view rejects the idea that there is some rendition of the universe of knowledge that reflects some absolute structure of subjects and their relationships.... This post-modern point of view would also reject any claim of absolute referential truth for any other assertion about the world or humankind, concluding instead that all arrangements of the subjects of the universe of knowledge are better spoken of as conveniences that arise from human discourse at given times, and that they vary among themselves with all the differences that arise from individuality in society. There is consequently no one best classification of knowledge system—that is, best in the sense of being accurate in any absolute sense. (p. 86)

I think that the way that the Vancouver Island Regional Library organizes its collection is an important issue. I suggest that, in light of customers' and branch heads' apparent lack of understanding how the DDC works, that Beth and Hjørland and Albrechtsen's pragmatic approach has merit. Moreover, trying to classify materials perfectly makes little sense if you adopt Miksa's postmodern view that there is no one correct way to classify knowledge and if no-one understands it anyway.

Before I became interested in the way postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently I thought that, although a perfectly organized public library might not be possible to achieve, it was an ideal toward which librarians should strive. I now think this belief can be a problem for public libraries. I have worked with librarians who seemed to think that the Vancouver Island Regional Library must meet exactly the standards prescribed by the modern tenets of public librarianship. When they realize that the Regional Library does not meet those modern standards they seem to become demoralized. Some blame our lack of perfection on the library board's unwillingness to provide sufficient funds to enable them to do their jobs to the level of accuracy they seem to believe is required. A few have left in search of a perfect library elsewhere. A few seem to have become resigned to working for a library that, to them, is second rate.

In chapter seven I suggest that we reconsider many of the basic tenets of a modern, perfect public library and suggest pragmatic strategies we might implement instead. Even if we cannot implement these strategies because of the inertia of the Regional Library and other public libraries, perhaps just thinking about them may help such staff to abandon, what I think are, unrealistic expectations about the Regional Library.

5.10. Increase in Information and the Internet

I asked a number of focus groups and individual stakeholders whether or not they thought information was exploding. The modern view that the growth of information is under control emerged in Bert's response. He said,

“I don't think it's a case of more information. I think it's just that it's getting more and more accessible.... At work I spend a lot of time on the Internet because it's now possible to find out information about materials and schematics instead of having to get catalogues. You can get a basic understanding from the Internet. It's not in-depth but it is more accessible through the Internet. I guess there may be more information in certain fields that are expanding—such as technology.”

Paul also seemed to think that, while information is growing, it is under control. He said,

“Technology has been exploding and information that describes that technology has had to keep pace. A lot more information is available just because of the efficiencies of copying and distribution.... It's just that in certain fields the rate of change is very rapid so there's a greater emphasis on keeping up. Just because of better communication globally there is more information on many topics. For example, if you had an interest in religious cults, you're going you find that there are a lot more of them out there and it's a lot easier for you to find out about them so you probably have a lot more work to do to try to keep up.”

Denise seemed to be excited by the increase in information and her ability to access it herself. She said,

“I don't think it's exploding. I think that today if I want information I have so many sources that I don't have to worry. I can remember when I was younger always trying to find the person who knew something. We went for people. If you wanted to know something you had to get the lady or the man who was the authority on the subject. But now I know I can be on my own and find my own information because there are so many sources. Especially the Internet—I just love it because I don't need to ask anybody. I can just find my own information. Also, I think if you go into the bookstores you'll see a lot of how-to-do-it books which we never saw before.”

I interpret Bert, Paul and Denise as each expressing the modern view of the growth of information because they were not concerned that it was making us less knowledgeable. Instead they seemed to think that our access to information is improving and allowing us to know more.

Other stakeholders commented on the negative aspects of the increase of information. For example, when I asked Jill whether she thought information was exploding, she said,

“Think of the Internet. I don’t surf the Internet too often, but when I happen to, you have to get through a lot of stuff before you can find what you are looking for. Another thing is that the explosion of information sometimes makes it harder for you to work or do your job because there is too much out there to sift through before you find what you really want or need.”

I interpret Jill’s comment as being postmodern because she seems to be suggesting that “the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance” (Smart, 1993, p. 105). Paul’s comment also had overtones of this postmodern concept.

When I asked Lou if he thought that information was exploding he said,

“An explosion is absolutely the way that it’s going. There’s the idea that information just keeps on going out further and further and further. The quantity of knowledge has become an exponential experience.”

In response to my question about how that makes him feel, he answered humourously,

“Behind.”

Lou’s comments seem to indicate a postmodern view because, like Jill, he seems to be suggesting the “the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance” (Smart, 1993, p. 105).

Quentin’s response to my question about the explosion of information was,

“Absolutely. I agree with it. In fact I’ve read that one issue of the *New York Times* has more information than what the average person in his whole lifetime would experience in the seventeen hundreds.... One issue of the *New York Times*. One daily newspaper. So you know, people are just bombarded with information. It’s overwhelming. It’s unmanageable really and it’s increasing people’s sense of alienation and frustration. The fact is they feel incapable of coping. They can’t deal with it because they feel that there’s so much information that they can’t possibly keep up.”

I interpret Quentin’s comment as also being an expression of a postmodern perspective because he seems to be suggesting that “there is more and more information, and less and less meaning” (Smart, 1992, p. 127). The concept that one issue of the *New York*

Times contains more information than the average person in the past would have come across in a lifetime was also mentioned by Eisenberg (2003) at the 2003 British Columbia Library Association Conference. I couldn't help wondering where this fact came from. Who created this piece of knowledge? How did they count the amount of knowledge known by the average person in the 17th century? Why do we seem to think we know this?

I think Len's view of the growth of information is interesting. When I asked him about it he said,

"I might be something of a dinosaur but it's kind of like this: This time in human history is unprecedented in the number of numbers we have to remember, or the number of systems that we have to learn to be able to survive. For every piece of electronic hardware, we have to learn how to operate it. Somebody was saying something earlier about having technical problems operating some electronic equipment³⁰. Those problems apply to everything from telephones, fax machines, computers, card catalogues or whatever. I, to some extent, have decided that I'm going to devote the rest of my life to protesting some of that. Not all of it—but some of it—as much as is pragmatic for my existence. If I'm forced to do it, then I'll learn it, but if somebody is going to kindly help me out with it, I'll take the help. There are too many things to know."

I interpret Len's view as being postmodern because he seems to be suggesting he is developing his own personal "information dietetics" (Smart, 1992, p. 137) to relieve the "alienation and frustration" about having too many things to know.

Other stakeholders talked about how the library can help deal with the growth of information. Referring to looking for information, Jill said,

"I always like starting with the library. Sure all this stuff on the Internet is fine but I like having a book in front of me. If you print it off the Internet you get 50 pages and all you wanted was one. It's like, 'Oh my God, how do I turn this thing off? Stop!' I would rather come to the library and sit and look at a couple of books and there you have lots of information. Yet you will find it on the Internet if you know what you are looking for. It depends on your motivation."

³⁰ This refers to my comment prior to Len and Jill's focus group that I had had problems taping the librarian focus group.

Eleanor, a branch head, said,

“That’s why I think people will still want libraries and books—because it’s a definitive thing. I mean the shelf can only hold so many. It’s not going to go on endlessly.”

Library theorists also comment on the libraries role in dealing with the increase in information. Rungkat (1996) comments,

Will the amount of information on the Internet cause frustration and overload? One librarian in the United States has suggested that the size of the Internet knowledge-bank has contributed to a state of “infoglut”, where the viewer/user is turned off by the never-ending amount of information available. They feel helpless in the face of so much information to wade through and unable to apply it to their particular requirements. Librarians have always been aware of this problem, and we should remember it particularly when some of our users decide to avoid the Internet, not because it is a mechanical monster, but because it is never ending.

G. P. Radford (1998) says that Anthes (1985)

has argued that “because of high technology any library can have vast amounts of information, much more than any student or faculty would want, need, or use. The librarian’s job now becomes more one of interpretation, filtering, and evaluation” (p. 57). What is being “interpreted, filtered, and evaluated” is not which specific text is required to meet a specific need but, rather on which collection of texts and the explanation of a criteria which relates them as a coherent set. It is that which relates texts which becomes the information that is valuable rather than the specific information contained within a specific text.

I interpret both Rungkat and G. P. Radford as suggesting that librarians have always had a role in dealing with vast amounts of information. While Rungkat, writing in 1996, acknowledges the postmodern view that information is “never-ending,” he seems to suggest that librarians’ traditional modern approach can still apply. On the other hand, G. P. Radford, writing in 1998, seems to suggest that librarians need to take an entirely new approach to dealing with information.

John’s view of the growth of information is interesting. Referring to the Internet, he said,

“If I go looking for a specific piece of information, there are so many items that are available out there when you go on the search engines that you don’t have time to check them all out. Yet you could miss ten that were the most valuable

ones that you wanted. Yet isn't it funny—because we don't stop looking for information. Most of us are constantly out there looking for some more information on an issue.”

While John appears to be concerned by the difficulty of having time to read everything available on the Internet about a subject, he still appears to think that most people are constantly looking for more information. I interpret this as both modern and postmodern. It seems to be modern in that it assumes some notion of complete knowledge. It seems postmodern in that John isn't frustrated by the expansion of information and in that the criterion he uses to judge information is “most valuable” rather than true. I think John's comment is of particular interest to the Vancouver Island Regional Library since John identified himself as a library supporter but not a library user. In other words, John's ongoing search for information has not taken him to the library.

Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I found it useful to distinguish between information and knowledge. As Budd (1992) states,

The hierarchy begins with data at the bottom, moves up to information, then to knowledge, and ultimately to wisdom. It would be the rare library that would have the capability of dispensing wisdom to users, but it may be possible that an individual comes to wisdom with some assistance from the content of artefacts in libraries. (1992, p. 24)

Quentin put it this way,

“So we can think of the difference between knowledge and understanding and wisdom and discernment. In a sense it's all based on information but the understanding is being able to put it all together.... So, say you have the information that the ferry runs at eight fifteen or whatever, the wise person will act in harmony with that and arrange his affairs to get down there so the wisdom is the practical application.”

Paul also saw a difference between knowledge and information. He said,

“When you get into definitions of things, it becomes a bit difficult. Generally I think of information as something I can put a small effort into absorbing. Information is available. It is documented somewhere or I can ask somebody and

so on. Knowledge is more like experience or wisdom. When I say I have knowledge of human behaviour that implies that I have some depth of understanding of the subject. Not that I look up a single piece of information to answer a question, but rather that I have some depth of understanding and maybe I can, if I choose to be analytical, draw my own conclusions. Information tends to be data that you can apply if you wish and maybe it is amenable to analysis. For example, having knowledge of the ferries as opposed to information about the schedule would be to know that in general they put on extra sailings in the summer without necessarily knowing when they start and when they end. And also knowing that in the winter they don't do that but they do on long weekends. Also knowledge implies some understanding of how often they stay on their schedule. That's what the words tend to mean to me, but in common usage, I don't know if there is that much difference."

I think the fact that both Quentin and Paul mentioned the ferries as an example of information and knowledge, with no prompting from me, is quite interesting. As people living on Vancouver Island, it seems that our knowledge is local and contextual. One of the things we all need to know about is the ferries.

Awareness of postmodern epistemological thought has allowed me to think differently about the distinction between the terms, information and knowledge. There seem to be two postmodern ways of thinking about these concepts. They both differ from Budd, Quentin and Paul's hierarchal views. One postmodern view of knowledge or information focuses on the narrow, personal and interpretive nature of knowledge (Ritzer, 1997, p. 3) mentioned above. The other view focuses on "the growth of knowledge" (Smart, 1993, p. 105) and is also described as the explosion of knowledge or "infoglut" (Rungkat, 1996). What we label these two concepts does not seem to be particularly important. As Paul notes, the terms, "knowledge" and "information," tend to be used inter-changeably in common usage. However, the tension between the two concepts is interesting. I think that we can think of the vast explosion of knowledge as being composed of myriads of small, local and interpreted bits of knowledge. Each bit of knowledge was constructed by someone. Each bit is recorded somewhere—in a book, a microfilm, a computer disc or hard drive, a DVD, or some other physical location. In a

sense macro-knowledge is composed of vast amounts of micro-knowledge in the same way that the universe is made up of individual atomic and sub-atomic particles.

Libraries have traditionally been the institutions that decided which bits of knowledge were important, organized these bits according to strict classification rules, and stored them for future retrieval. However, this tradition is changing. Website, by individual website, the Internet now provides access to far more information than any public library could ever hope to accumulate. Likewise, article by article, enormous online databases such *Academic Search Elite*, which offers full text articles for nearly 1,850 scholarly journals back as far as 1985, provide access to information that no public library could dream of providing on its own.

In chapter seven, I will look at criteria for successful answers to reference questions in terms of the almost endless sources of information now available.

5.11. Role of Professionals and Librarians

As mentioned in chapter one, the staff of the Vancouver Island Regional Library can be seen as falling into two main categories. The professional librarians are workers who have a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science. The clerical staff are workers who, by and large, have learned about libraries on the job. Both clerical staff and professional librarians work in branch libraries. Members of the general public and the local media seem to be unaware of these differences and call everyone who works in a Regional Library branch a librarian, regardless of their training.

When I asked Jill what she thought made a person a professional she answered,

“What makes a person a professional? Having a set of values, ethics, morals, and beliefs around a certain subject; adhering to a code of ethics; often times personal exploration and understanding about what professional behaviour is; and or maybe having a university degree.”

Jill also commented,

“I would say that a librarian is a professional because they have a vision and set of goals and values but they also have to deal with issues in the public domain.”

I interpret Jill as having a modern view because she seemed to be suggesting that professionals, including librarians, have expertise in an area of knowledge or a discipline.

Margaret answered my question about what she thought made a person a professional by saying,

“A nurse, whether they are an LPN, RN, or psychiatric nurse, is a nurse because we have a governing body. We have a college. And we have a code of ethics. Care aides don’t have a code of ethics. You know what a code of ethics does to a professional body.”

She also commented,

“To me you’re a professional body. It’s not like there’s only one librarian. It’s not like there’s only one library. You have to be a professional to run the library as a business, to know what’s happening, to know what the needs are, to look at the community—whether it be Tahsis, Vancouver, Victoria or Nanaimo. You’re not going to have 3855 books in Tahsis when you know they only need one or two. You have the knowledge that is needed.”

I also interpret Margaret as having a modern view of professionals because she seemed to be suggesting that both nurses and librarians are professionals and can be depended upon to make good decisions.

When I asked Lou and Bonnie about professionals, Lou talked about a professional educator he thought was behaving unprofessionally. Lou said,

“I’m thinking about a person I know of who went on an aid project to a foreign country and is trying to make the college there be like a Canadian college. To me, it wouldn’t matter what level of education he had, he’s being unprofessional. He’s working in a system which is trying to build its own educational institution and it is not his right to try to make it meet the same standard as he would in Canada. To be professional would mean that that person with his knowledge and information and background, would be able to look at what the needs are, and then encourage them to build what is needed there in the context of the skills that they have. To me, that would be a professional.”

I interpret Lou's perspective as being modern because his criticism of one particular professional's behaviour seems to suggest that he thinks professionals should behave in such a way that they can be relied upon to solve society's problems.

Denise made this comment about a social worker:

“But I remember when my girl friend was accused by a social worker of having a dysfunctional family because they didn't have a kitchen table. They didn't talk around the kitchen table about the events that happened that day. That particular social worker thought that was a characteristic of a good family. But we all know families work in wondrous ways now. We have two women who are mother and father—that confuses me still. We have two men that are mother and father—that one confuses me even worse. And then we have adopted children into families and we have sperm from somebody and frozen stuff from somebody else and they make test-tube babies. So what is a family anymore? So can anybody from the social services say you're dysfunctional because you haven't got a kitchen table? Well she didn't have a kitchen table because she had a trailer and she had a little kitchen where the table wouldn't fit.”

I interpret Denise's comments to indicate a modern view since she seemed to think the social worker should have been more knowledgeable. I also interpret her view of families as being modern since she seems to be quite confused by families which do not fit the norm.

A postmodern view of librarians as professionals seemed to emerge from John's comments. He said,

“To me a librarian is first of all somebody who cares about the job and has an extreme personal interest in that kind of work. To me the operation of a library can be learned by doing. Whatever is involved with gaining your Masters to become an official highly educated librarian—although it probably has value—if I were to be blunt with you I would say I'm not so sure it has much value.”

I interpret John's comment as being postmodern because he seems to discount the notion of professionalism entirely.

Library staff made a number of comments on the difference between professional librarians and clericals. For example, Beth, a professional librarian, commented,

“I see the clericals in branches as being the people who do, what I think of—and I could get into very murky water here—as the routine tasks—the day to day

procedural work that needs to be done to keep the library running, to make sure the books come and go in an orderly fashion, and to make sure that people get the things they came in to look for.... I think the other thing is that librarians are professionals and you can put greater expectations on them as far as what they can do ... than you can on the clerical staff. It isn't fair to expect clerical staff to do these things. They have no background. They have no training. And they really don't have the time. So I think the expectation can be greater for a librarian to do all these different things."

Deidre, a branch head, said,

"I remember a conversation with my previous area librarian. She's somebody who has her career in mind and she's doing her thing and I think she's marvellous. She was so wonderful to work with. She was so surprised when I told her I had absolutely no ambition to go anywhere besides doing exactly what I was doing. We were sitting in our little branch at the little yellow table. I think she was doing my evaluation or something. She went, 'What?' And I realized—like we became quite good friends personally as well—but there was totally this huge difference between us. She was doing this thing and I was enjoying my job. It was just so different."

Amy, a branch head, commented

"I did have one comment from one of our librarians. Someone wrote up something in our local paper and called me a 'librarian.' They didn't like that very much at all. It's just a comment. You know I always get, 'You're the librarian'. You have to go through this big spiel that you're not a librarian but after so many years you kind of feel like you are—not a librarian—but you feel like that."

Nancy, a branch head, said,

"Some professional people are more secure in their jobs so they don't feel threatened by people who aren't professionals. Others are worried that maybe you're going to push ahead of yourself so they sort of want to maintain their position. I'm lucky. It's not anything that I have to deal with personally but I know that there are people that are like that."

Katie, a librarian, commented,

"I could understand it if they've ever been supervised by a librarian who uses their title and their status to get authority or respect rather than through the service they provide. I think that if a librarian is providing the service that he or she is being paid to provide, most staff, unless they're cranky people, will appreciate the resources that are being delivered to them and offered to them. If the librarian is a slack ass who uses their title to get their authority and says, 'I'm the doctor and you're not.' So then the title becomes a club. If I worked for them I'd say, 'What makes you better than me?'"

I think that these comments indicate a tension between the professional librarians and the “clerical librarians” that may be damaging work relationships in the library.

Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I occasionally wondered why professional librarians, as a group, had not taken the steps, which doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, and so on have taken, to establish themselves as a self-governing professional body. Other than the American Library Association, which accredits schools of library and information science, librarians have not established an accrediting authority that approves their induction and continuation in the profession. Librarians have not adopted a code of ethics that governs their behaviour nor have they established a governing college to ensure that members uphold such a code of ethics. Because of this, there seems to be no mechanism to ensure accountability within the profession. In other words, I think that so-called professional librarians (I among them) are not professionals in the modern sense of the word. Compared to most clerical staff, we are relatively well-educated and seem to have had a number of modern values or library tenets, such as belief in the neutral stance, inculcated into us. However, we do not have the necessary trappings to be called a modern profession.

Awareness of the difference between modern and postmodern epistemological thought has allowed me to question the concept of professionals in general. Abandoning the idea that people with Masters Degrees in librarianship are professionals might not be difficult if we were to adopt a postmodern view that it is not possible to be a professional in the way modern thought says it is. Since truth is not out there waiting to be found, knowledge is not a privileged body of thought that we can protect preciously, and it is not possible for us to step outside our own biases, professionalism seems to be simply another modern illusion. In chapter seven I will discuss this further.

5.12. Original Thoughts and Intertextuality and the Future of Libraries

I asked one of the focus groups if they thought truly original thoughts were possible.

The following discussion took place:

Evelyn: “Yes.”

Bert: “I hope so.”

Evelyn: “I hope so too. You think that all the ideas have been done, but all the things that are happening right now are unique—where the technology is and our history. September 11th just happened and all this stuff is happening that makes this time unique.... Everybody has original thoughts. I think we’re having original thoughts right now.”

I interpret Evelyn and Bert’s comments as expressing the modern view because they seem to believe quite strongly that original thoughts are possible.

I asked the same question of Len and Jill. Len replied,

“Oh absolutely. For example, have you seen the movie *A Beautiful Mind*? It’s worth seeing. A mathematician identified a problem. This problem was extrapolated by him from an individual level to the level of economies or nations. It had to do with a group of university students in a bar.... The mathematician studied the problem and he said, ‘The solution to the problem of us making contact with these women is to ignore the one front and centre because, if each of us compete for her, we will all lose. She will reject us all and all the other women will reject us afterwards because they don’t want to be second choice. So the way that we all will succeed is by approaching the other women and ignoring the one we all want.’.... This was the premise behind this and it was an original idea. Forty years went by and it was recognized and awarded the Nobel Prize. There are original ideas that come out of research that are awarded things like Nobel Prizes. That’s where original ideas are recognized.”

I interpret Len’s view as being modern because, like Bert and Evelyn, he seems to believe quite strongly in the possibility of original thoughts.

I think Len’s comment that breakthrough ideas are awarded Nobel Prizes suggests how widely this modern view is held. Yet this does not seem to be the way it works in practice. According to John F. Nash (1994), the scientist portrayed in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, the equilibrium concept for non-cooperative games for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize was not completely original. It was based on the work of von

Neumann and Morgenstern. Moreover, Nash received the Nobel Prize only after his work had been used as the basis for advances in other areas of science, including evolution theory. I think this way of looking at Nash's work is closer to a postmodern view of intertextuality than it is to the modern view of original thought.

Jill also expressed a modern perspective about original thought when she said,

“I think people can have new original ideas. But remember when I mentioned the gold card and you said you had thought about that? People have ideas all the time. But chances are somebody else, for example in Australia, is going to have the same idea at the same time. I'll tell you another one of my ideas. Library books would have special barcodes. We would have something like the TV clicker at home and we would scan the barcode when we got home. Then when we wanted to find the library books, we'd press the clicker and the library book will beep.”

The idea for the gold card that Jill referred to was the suggestion that the Regional Library could develop a smart card where people could win points by donating books to the library. They could use their points to pay down library fines. I had had a similar idea independently of Jill. However, I don't think either of us had a truly original thought. We simply took the idea of a smart card, which is used for such things as buying photocopying in a university library, and applied it to a Vancouver Island Regional Library issue.

A more postmodern view of original thoughts and intertextuality seems to emerge in a comment made by Jessica when I asked the fourth focus group whether they thought writers have original ideas. She said,

“It's a bit like a quilt. You know the images that are associated with that. In the case of a quilt you know that pattern. But the way that that particular colour or particular idea gets put together with all the other ideas makes something entirely new. In a sense admitting that is a whole new idea.”

I interpret Jessica's comment as being postmodern because it suggests that “a whole host of other texts speak in these texts” (Madison, 1990, p. viii). I think it is interesting that Jessica suggests that admitting there are no truly original thoughts is a new idea in

itself. I think this comment demonstrates the complexity and somewhat paradoxical nature of this postmodern concept. Yes, texts interrelate and ideas build on ideas, and no, original thoughts do not spring from nowhere, but we do get sudden insights. Rosenau (1992) cites Harland (1987) as saying that postmodernists (sceptics) substitute terms such as “instantaneous lightning-flashes of paradoxical illumination” for “theory” (p. 82). I think this is an interesting way of describing a thought which may not be entirely original but, nonetheless, is new.

A postmodern view of original thought also emerged when Jill talked about where authors get their ideas. She said,

“I’ve read romance type science fiction. They did that a long time ago. Some authors I think were writing that way fairly early on. So I would say yes, probably people who write also read and they probably take ideas from other books. ‘I really like that. That was a neat idea’ and they incorporate it. I don’t think we can help but take a good idea and capitalize on it. So I would say yes, people do probably take ideas from other writers and then integrate into their own material.”

I interpret this as a postmodern perspective because she is talking about the intertextual relationship between writers of fiction.

Gordon, who was working on his Masters Degree, also raised the paradoxical nature of this postmodern concept when he said,

“I was thinking about biases and originality related to the research stuff that we’ve been doing. Admitting your biases is important. In your thesis introduction and abstract you have to give a basis from where your ideas came from. Yet it’s supposed to be something original—something that has never been done before. You get your ideas from your experience, from things you read in the literature, from interviewing people. I think it’s all based on something.”

I think Gordon’s comment is interesting because it raises the issue of original thought in an academic setting. According to James Cook University (2000), “‘Research’ means the process leading to the production of original scholarly or creative work to be presented for the purpose of obtaining the degree.” Clearly there is an expectation from James Cook University that the thesis I am writing should be original in some way.

However, the originality comes not out of nowhere, but as Gordon said, by putting together ideas from personal experience, from the literature, and from interviews with research participants to create something that is new and interesting. I think it is interesting that Len, who seemed so convinced of original thought in relation to *A Beautiful Mind* also earlier expressed an understanding, similar to Gordon's, of how a thesis is developed.

My musings about a postmodern view of original thoughts and intertextuality suggested thoughts about the interrelatedness of ideas in a public library. Deidre, a branch head, commented on this interrelatedness when she described how she tried to help customers find books in her small branch library that related to their interests. She said,

“But it's pretty interesting. It's really fun, in such a small branch, to be able to keep those threads in my head for people that I know and try to keep it alive for them. Then when it starts to get a little stagnant I'm going 'Yaaa, where am I going to go from here?'”

Nancy made a similar comment about connections within the collection for people interested in genealogy. She said,

“It's the same actually with genealogy. You look at the genealogy books and then you want to move to the history books. What did my friend say? Her grandfather played on some funny team. It was sort of an unusual sport. So then she was in the sports section finding out all about that sport. And then you want to get pictures and use little graphs so you go into the graphic art books to get pictures or you hear somebody came over on a certain ship. So then you've got to go to the old ship books and you've got to look for ships or trains or whatever. So you're basically following your genealogy through all the different sections. You're going from one to the other.”

The idea that all the works in a library are related to each other intertextually suggests the thought that the Regional Library can be seen as a realm of interrelated ideas. This is a very different from understanding the library as a collection of individual library artefacts—books, magazines, videos, CDs, (and perhaps even cards

suggesting you contact your local logger for an alternate view) taking up space on the shelves. Buckland (1997) comments on this dichotomy, “Libraries exist for the benefit of the mind, but they have serious practical problems coping with the acquisition, storage and handling of the documents and records with which they deal.”

Before I became interested in the ways postmodern thought might help us understand public libraries differently, I saw the Regional Library as a place of artefacts. Futurists have been suggesting for some time that books and other physical library artefacts will soon be replaced by various digital forms of information. If this happens physical libraries will no longer be needed. I think the idea that public libraries are doomed to disappear is becoming quite widespread. After hearing this issue discussed at a recent staff meeting, I concluded that many Vancouver Island Regional Library librarians believe that public libraries will not exist in 50 years. I think librarians’ belief that libraries are doomed to disappear is a serious issue for public libraries. How can we prepare for the future if we believe no future lies ahead?

Thinking of the Vancouver Island Regional Library as a realm of interrelated ideas rather than shelves and shelves of books and other physical artefacts allows me to think about the future of the Regional Library in a different, more optimistic way. I suggest that the Regional Library will probably provide access to ideas through a variety of formats, from print books to DVDs to ebooks for years to come. In other words, I suggest that if we can think of the Vancouver Island Regional Library as a place that shares ideas rather than a place of books and other artefacts, we can see it as having a

future. In chapter seven, I suggest that the Regional Library needs to take a postmodern approach to preparing for multiple futures³¹.

5.13. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to interpret, hermeneutically, some of the Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders' views, opinions and ideas in terms of postmodern epistemological thought. Because I am a library director as well as a moderate postmodernist I have also suggested new ways of thinking about various contemporary library issues and hinted at possible pragmatic strategies which seem to be consistent with postmodern understandings. I will develop these ideas and strategies in more detail in chapter seven.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to interpret some of the Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders' views, opinions and ideas in terms of the postmodern social condition and postmodern social, cultural and economic thought.

After Chapter Five

Writing this chapter was difficult. It seemed a house of cards.

I longed for the illusion of certainty that was mine before I ventured this postmodern way.

³¹ The term "multiple futures" comes from a strategic planning workshop put on by M. Doma of Canadian Professional Management Services. He said that the concept was developed by Don Trider, PhD, a consultant for the company. Shoemaker (2002) also discusses this subject. It is used to indicate that contemporary organizational planning includes consideration of scenarios for many possible futures.

Before Chapter Six

This thesis is getting too big. There are too many words.

The James Cook University Handbook for Research Higher Degree Students says that the thesis for a Doctor of Philosophy should not normally exceed 100,000 words. My advisor tells me about a student who was penalised by an examiner for being 20% over length.

I don't want to be penalized. I know how to conform to the rules – only one bag of garbage per week, recycle paper and cans, in winter clear the snow off the sidewalk, in summer water the lawn only every other day, don't speed, pay your bills, pay your taxes, return your library books on time. I know how to play the game.

I set up a spreadsheet to keep track of my words.

The ultimate quantitative approach.

CHAPTER 6. MODERN/POSTMODERN SOCIAL THEMES

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will continue to engage in a hermeneutic interpretation of the interviews and focus groups I held with stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library. Here I will interpret comments that I think are related to the postmodern social condition. I will also interpret comments on the questionnaire I sent to librarians and branch heads as the first step in my research.

I see the themes associated with the postmodern social condition as relating to each other and to the themes in chapter five in much the same rhizomatic fashion that I mentioned in chapter five. As with chapter five, for each theme, I quote stakeholders' comments and interpret them as illustrations of modern or postmodern perspectives. Then, in light of the comments, ideas from the literature, and my own experience and pre-understandings of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, I muse briefly about related library issues.

Perhaps I need to mention again that this thesis is not a scientific analysis that is resulting in the discovery of the true meaning of these comments. This is not my intention. Readers are free to agree or disagree with my interpretation. Despite my not claiming to have found the truth, I still use the understanding evoked by my interpretation as the basis for looking at the Regional Library and other public libraries differently and as the underpinning upon which to construct some pragmatic strategies that may be useful in practice. I will develop these ideas and strategies further in chapter seven's second hermeneutic cycle.

In chapter six, I interpret stakeholders' comments that seem to be related to the following modern/postmodern social themes

1. Power and relationships in the Regional Library

2. The panoptic principle and overdue fines
3. Social problems and moral panics
4. Significant groups and service to rural areas
5. Feminism and the staff of the Regional Library
6. Culture and the Regional Library's collection
7. Paranormal beliefs, religion and Library cataloguing
8. Waged work and uncertainty in the Regional Library
9. Bureaucracy and the goal of the Regional Library.

I will go into slightly more depth for three themes than I will for other themes.

These themes are

1. Power and relationships in the Regional Library
2. Feminism and the staff of the Regional Library
3. Paranormal beliefs, religion and cataloguing

I found those three topics complex and compelling and decided that to spend more time interpreting stakeholders' comments about them.

6.2. Power and Relationships in the Regional Library

A board member described what I think is a modern understanding of the way power is shared in the Regional Library:

“So to me the customer has the power. The customer makes their demands to the staff. The staff bring them to the attention of Penny. Penny brings them to the attention of the board. The board gives directions back to Penny. Penny empowers her staff to do what the board has told her to do. . . . So it's the people who have the power. You won't have a library unless the people want it because they won't pay their taxes.”

I interpret this comment as expressing the modern understanding of power because it suggests that power exists within a formal, hierarchal structure. Ultimately, because the Regional Library is a tax-supported organization, the taxpayers have all the power.

I think the modern view of power also appears in the answers given by the librarians' focus group, when I asked them who they thought had the most power in the Regional Library:

Katie: "LST." [middle management]
Alice: "SMT." [senior management]
Beth: "No, the board."
Isabel: "The board."
Beth: "Isn't that bizarre."

Each person seemed to hold the modern view that, not only is power something "that people have," but also that they have it because of the formal bureaucratic structure. I must admit that I also talked from the modern perspective, when asking the question. At the time my own postmodern understanding of power was, and continues to be, evolving. I think it is possible that asking the question in that way encouraged stakeholders to reply in the same vein. Isabel then commented,

"When I first came to the library it would have been the clerks. No, I'm serious.... When I first joined the system..., the director at that time used to try and undermine the librarians' authority by dealing directly with the branch heads and the branch heads actually had more power than most of the librarians. So the branch heads in those days had a feeling of total control. They could get some of the things they wanted from the director that no librarian could ever get."

I interpret this as indicating that Isabel has a modern view for two reasons. First she seems to think that power is something that people have. Second, she seems to think that the earlier director should have given more power to the librarians so that power could have flowed down through the hierarchy in proper bureaucratic fashion. My recollection of that period was that there was no formal hierarchical structure. Everyone, whether librarian, branch head, driver, clerical assistant or page, seemed to report directly to the director. Although this could now be seen as a postmodern approach, I think at the time the director was unwilling to share his formal power with anyone else.

It was frustrating for modern librarians like Isabel who assumed she had a senior position within a hierarchy.

While postmodern views of power were not discussed specifically in the interviews and focus groups, I think that some of the stakeholders' comments can be interpreted by using the three interrelated postmodern views of power I mentioned in chapter four. They are:

1. Power appears to be intimately related to knowledge.
2. Power appears to be diffuse, permeating all social relationships.
3. Power appears to exist in fellowships of discourse.

6.2.1. Power and Knowledge

An example of how power and knowledge are related can be seen in the following interchange. A library manager said,

“I’ve seen people come on the board with fairly negative views of libraries and be completely turned around during the time that they work on the library board.”

A librarian replied,

“And making that change I really see as the responsibility of the senior staff. If there’s an opening for those whose minds are not completely closed, senior staff should offer to make it easier for them to learn about the library.”

The manager added,

“Sometimes we’re giving them [the board members] very complex reports which they cannot just read the night before and understand fully. Sometimes the way the questions go and the decisions which are made are not exactly what we, as staff, might wish for. But generally we’ve been able to steer them back pretty much where we think they should go. So sometimes we have to go back and go back until we get it the way we think it should be. Or we have to face the fact that we’re not going to persuade them and let it lie until another board comes along.”

I see these comments as suggesting that the librarian and the manager see themselves as having knowledge about “where the Library should go” but no power to take it there. In contrast, they seem to see the board members as having power over where the Library

should go but no knowledge. In order for the librarian and the manager to take the Library “where it should go,” the manager must “go back and go back” to persuade the board members to adopt management’s knowledge.

A branch head described the clerical staff’s relationship with the board:

“A lot of the people, guys I guess you could say, that are running the library—they’re not even library users. I mean, we never see them. Well we do see one or two of them a little bit. But as a whole I don’t know what they’re basing their decisions on. I guess something or other but it’s certainly not in any consultations with staff.... But to me, if you run something you should know something about it. It seems sometimes that the qualifications to run anything in this world is you don’t know anything about it. The less you know about it the more likely you are to run it.”

Here, the branch head seems to think that it is the clerical staff who have knowledge about the Library but no power. Like the librarian and the manager, this branch head also seems to think the board members have power but no knowledge. Unlike the manager, who appears to think that they might eventually be able to persuade the board members to accept their knowledge, the branch head has no opportunity to persuade the board members because they do not come into the branch.

Although the librarian, the manager and the branch head seem to think the board members have no knowledge about the Regional Library, I do not agree with them. While board members may not be knowledgeable about the internal workings of the Library, they do have knowledge about how, at least some of, their constituents value the Library. In other words, they have some knowledge about tax payers’ willingness to pay for the Library. They are therefore able to make decisions regarding Library funding. As a board member commented,

“What would happen if a 100% of the board were avid library users? We would probably lean towards over-service. Over-service is a difficult word. We would probably lean toward a standard of service that the community as a whole would not be willing to pay for.”

Another example of how power can be seen to be related to knowledge emerges from Margaret's comment about visiting a library branch:

“And it's intimidating, very intimidating. If you go in there and you want help, you see how the staff seems to be stressed. They've got twenty people wanting to take books out and returning books and asking questions. And then you come up with your humble question saying, 'Could you help me?' They say, 'It's over there.' It would be nice to have someone say, 'Oh, Jane's the person who can help you find what you're looking for.' I like to talk to a person. I even have a hard time when it comes to using the telephone when it says, 'Press number one' and then they tell you all these other numbers. I'd sooner speak to a person.”

I interpret Margaret's comment to indicate that she sees herself as a powerless because she lacks knowledge.

6.2.2. The Diffuse Nature of Power

We can also understand power within the Regional Library is in terms of the postmodern concept that power permeates all relationships. For example, a board member expressed a feeling of discomfort when going into the Central Services building:

“I wish I didn't have to go to your office because whenever I meet your staff I always wonder what I should do. Should I hang my head down like I'm embarrassed? Should I go through to the staff room and get coffee? Am I allowed in the bathroom? It's territorial in your office. I wish that we had our own door to go in and we went to our own boardroom.”

I think this comment indicates that power flows and shifts within the organization. In the staff room, which is used by the staff to relax during coffee breaks, the staff have power. In contrast, in a boardroom, where only board members are allowed to debate, the board members have power. I think this board member's feelings of embarrassment relates to their lack of power in the staff's territory. If there were a boardroom with its own entrance where staff did not go, this board member's power would be restored and they would no longer feel embarrassed.

Another example of how power shifts between people can be seen in the strangely convoluted power relationship between a librarian, a branch head, and a dishonest customer. A branch head commented,

“We have this magazine and I just hate it. So I always get it in and I say, ‘I’m putting this magazine out right away and maybe somebody will steal it and I’ll never see it again.’ And it goes—it gets stolen all the time. So I do have a little underhanded control there.”

In this example, it seems that the librarian, who has the knowledge and formal power to select the magazine subscription, does not have any power to ensure the magazine remains a permanent part of the branch’s collection. The branch head who has no formal power over the selection of the magazine subscription can exercise a modest (and perhaps underhanded) level of power over the individual magazine issue by putting it on display where a customer may steal it. The dishonest customer can exercise power over the magazine by simply stealing it. With the theft of the magazine, the branch head’s power over the magazine is restored.

6.2.3. Power and Discourse

Power can also be seen in terms of fellowships of discourse. The word discourse has appeared occasionally in this thesis. The term seems to be used to describe stories that people tell to make sense of their lives and their shared perspectives about certain things (Barton, 2002). Stokowski (2002) describes discourses as “the stable, situated, ritualized languages that arise—reflect the cultural and organizational structures of the social worlds which produce them, and offer seemingly rational perspectives for viewing individual and institutional behaviors” (p. 375). I think that Stokowski’s description of discourse represents quite well the way I am using the term in this thesis. The main difference is that, while I accept that discourses are often stable, I also think that they

can and do change. As people become aware of other ideas, they reconstruct their discourse. This is known as *discursive shift*.

An example of a discursive shift is Powers' (2002) comment that early feminists and indigenous activists have changed the discourse of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas from the discourse of "women as always already whore/traitor" to a "totalizing discourse of rape and victimhood." In other words, feminists and aboriginal activists have shifted the old discourse that aboriginal women willingly cooperated with the Spaniards to a new discourse that the Spaniards took advantage of the women. Although I am, of course, not suggesting such discourses apply to public libraries, I do think that the notion of discursive shift is useful in the study of public libraries.

Usherwood (1993) provides a detailed and interesting analysis of the relationships between the various governance and management roles in public libraries in Britain and the United States. He points out that while the

traditional or formal definition of the relationship between officers and members is that elected members make policy and officers administer it.... The dividing line between the work of the library officers and that of elected members is not always thought to be as clear as the formal/legalistic position might suggest. (pp. 51-52)

I suggest that a different and useful way of understanding the relationship between these different roles is in terms of "competing discourses."

I think this can be seen to apply to groups within the Regional Library. Although the librarians and branch heads each have their own discourses (which focus, at least in part, on the formal, knowledge-related and diffuse power relationships among them), I think they also share a common discourse about the Regional Library. For example, they seem to talk about the Regional Library in terms of lending materials to customers, helping customers use new services, and generally ensuring that customers are satisfied.

In other words, their discourse seems to deal with the things that they must think and talk about to keep the Library functioning.

I think the board members' shared discourse is quite different. They seem to talk about the Regional Library in terms of maintaining adequate service, keeping costs down, and remembering taxpayers' finite ability to pay for library services. Again the board members' discourse deals with the things they must think and talk about to keep the Library functioning.

I think the tension between these two dominant discourses—the staff's "discourse of customer satisfaction" and the board's "discourse of taxpayer satisfaction"—permeate the Regional Library and can, when not understood, cause difficulties for both groups. For example, if a staff member thinks that the board's discourse of "taxpayer satisfaction" is invalid, they will be frustrated and may think that board members don't know anything about the Regional Library. If a board member thinks that the staff's discourse of "customer satisfaction" is invalid, they may think that staff members' are presenting unrealistic budget proposals. I think the idea that there seem to be various competing discourses within the Vancouver Island Regional Library and that tensions can exist among these discourses can help us understand relationships within the Regional Library differently. No one group is right. Each group has simply created a discourse of shared beliefs that seems meaningful for them.

I think postmodern perceptions of power as shared discourse can be seen in the following comment by a librarian about the relationship between the librarians,

"One of the things that I thought about this organization was that there was a huge lack of trust amongst the professional staff of each other's abilities to make decisions.... I felt that every time that we had meetings to discuss something there was a real lack of energy or enthusiasm to try to come to some sort of decision and try to move things along. I felt it was because some people had their own personal agendas that were not related to the organization's goals and missions. They had their own personal little something going on that they were trying to

achieve.... I think that there was a feeling that there was a great deal of stagnation and that there wasn't a lot of opportunity for professionals to make the important decisions, to have a job that feels like you're doing the job and making the decisions, taking the responsibility and getting on with things. I think that's very important. That's power."

I interpret this comment as suggesting that the librarians, as knowledgeable professionals, want to be able to make decisions and "get on with things." They cannot do this because they have failed to develop a unified discourse. They do not share a "fellowship of discourse" (Ritzer, 1997, p. 46) because each of them is more interested in their own personal concerns.

Another example of power as a shared discourse emerged when I asked the branch heads in the third focus group how they felt about their relationship with their area librarians. A branch head responded jokingly,

"Or—how do you control your area librarian?"

I think this comment suggests a complex power relationship between the professional area librarians and the branch heads. While the librarians now have formal hierarchical power, in that they now supervise the branch heads, this power is an illusion. The branch heads continue to exert power, more or less subtly, in their relationships with the librarians. In other words, the branch heads' discourse includes how to control your librarian every bit as much as the librarians' discourse includes how to control your branch head.

A branch head commented on the subtle way that she had exerted power over a parent. I think this interaction can be interpreted in terms of power being related both to knowledge and to discourse:

"A father came in with his son one time. His son read *Hardy Boy* books and the father decided that he shouldn't be reading *Hardy Boy* books. He didn't want him to read all this junk. So he said, 'I want to get him a good book. Have you got a copy of *Little Men*?' I said, 'Oh yes, we have that, but there are some other ones that I'm sure he would like. Maybe he'd like this Jack London one.' I was

mentally going through what would a little boy like because I knew *Little Men* wasn't going to do it. It's not really the *Hardy Boys*. So I guess I had control then. Parent control.”

I interpret this comment as suggesting quite a complex set of power relationships and discourses. The father had decided to exert power over the son in order to improve the quality of his reading material. His discourse was that of the good parent wanting his child to read the best materials. Unfortunately he lacked the knowledge that *Little Men* is normally considered a girl's book. The branch head had that knowledge. Her discourse was a discourse of customer satisfaction and included knowledge about which books are enjoyed by which readers. While the father did not realize it, she used her knowledge both to exert power over the father and to support the father's power. She did this by overriding the father's decision that his son should read *Little Men* while ensuring the father's desire to provide the boy with better reading material was fulfilled. I thought the branch head's protection of the father's power and respect for his discourse resulted in good customer service. Perhaps good customer service could be interpreted as staff using their expertise to ensure that customers always retain power and that the customers' discourse is respected and supported by the staff.

The idea of postmodern power relationships in libraries was identified by Foucault (1977). G. P. Radford (1998) describes the power relationship which Foucault sees in libraries. The middle-aged female librarian is described as either “patrolling the library floors and saying ‘shhhh!’” or endlessly “‘stamping out’ the book.” In this power relationship, it is the librarian's role to create and maintain order and to ensure that every text has its proper place. The library user “represents a threat to that order” and undermines the librarian's power by removing the work from its proper place. The librarian reasserts her power by “stamping out” the work. G. P. Radford suggests that these stereotypes “serve to reinforce, in their very triviality and harmlessness, a

particular network of power relations that connect the librarian, the user, and the text” (pp. 618-620).

G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford (2001) describe their evolving understanding of the power relationship between librarians and users in their discussion about “the discourse of fear” in which, they suggest, this relationship exists:

The point we make here, and, to be sure, it is not a comfortable one, is that these arrangements are made possible by an overarching and constitutive discourse of fear. It is the themes of fear and control that make the library possible. Librarians cannot “choose” another style of discourse in which to represent their activity. Subjects become librarians because of the discourse of fear. The discourse always comes first. It is always one step ahead of any individual action because it is the discourse that makes that action possible. (G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford, 2001)

They suggest that more analysis is needed and propose that the next step should be “to address the role of discourse within actual library settings and to describe how the discourse of fear provides the backdrop of understanding for actual library practice.”

They conclude,

The ultimate outcome of such analysis would be to situate the library, and the discourse of fear, within prevailing systems of power and knowledge that constitute and maintain all of the discourses and institutions within contemporary Western civilization. This would be a big step, but an exciting one, and one that library scholarship needs to take in earnest.

I think G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford’s approach to interpreting power within a library in terms of the “discourse of fear” is interesting. It may even be possible to describe my interpretation of the power relationships suggested by Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders’ comments as an example of the analysis they recommend. However, I also think that their description of the “discourse of fear” seems disturbingly close to a new grand narrative that will finally allow us to discover the truth about the library. While I agree that it is possible to see libraries as situated in a “discourse of fear,” I do not agree that the “discourse of fear” is unchangeable. The

discourse is constructed in our minds and in our interactions. It does not exist “out there” determining what we do.

In chapter seven I will further discuss various aspects of power and relationships within the Regional Library.

6.3. The Panoptic Principle and Overdue Fines

Foucault’s views about power include the notions of the panoptic principle and the disciplinary society. I think these ideas can help us interpret stakeholders’ comments about the Library’s practice of charging fines for overdue materials.

Many library staff said they disliked collecting fines. For example in the third focus group, Deidre commented,

“I’m getting better at it. When I first started my job as branch head I was really good at it. And then I started to get to know all my customers and all their problems. And then if there are more than two or three people in the library, I have a really hard time saying something because it’s so small that everything’s heard and I want to keep their privacy. Then I found more tactful ways and all that. But my casuals are far better at it. You should see. I’ve been on holidays for two weeks. I went to look in the cashbox and I went ‘Holy Schmoley!’”

Nancy and Deirdre commented on the image they have in their communities because of library fines. Nancy said,

“You go to a party and it’s, ‘Oh my book—I’ve got it in the car. I’m dropping it off.’ And I don’t even know that they have that book. They really get that real guilty...”

Deidre responded,

“I know! I get that all the time! I’m in the co-op and it’s, ‘Oh Deirdre, I know I was going to bring that book back,’ and I’m going, ‘You know I’m not at work right now!’ I always reassure everybody, ‘I do not know what your fines are or how many books you have out at this time.’”

Nancy added,

“Even if you phone them to tell them that there’s a book there for them and you say, ‘This is the library’ and right away they say...”

Deidre finished her sentence

““Oh! Oh! I’m bringing it back!’ It’s funny isn’t it?”

It seems that, while librarians’ power within the “discourse of fear” may be trivial, (G. P. Radford & M. L. Radford, 2001) it is also widely experienced. People seem to have the idea that “the librarian knows” when it would be more accurate to say that the information is generated by, and stored in, the integrated library system. Since the Regional Library does not send out overdue notices, the staff only find out what fines are owing when a customer comes to the desk to check out a book. However, the customers know that the branch head can find out what they owe and will ultimately ask for payment.

Interestingly, when I asked library users what they thought about fines they did not seem very concerned. For example, Marlene said,

“It doesn’t bother me that much. I don’t get many fines because I use the library so often that I usually take the books back on time. I recently had an overdue craft book. I feel that even if I do get a fine it is less than buying the book. That even goes for most paperbacks nowadays³².”

Bonnie commented,

“I’m totally fine with it. Fines should be an incentive to get your book back and I think for most people they are. People don’t want to pay out money that they don’t have to but we’ll probably owe \$6.00 on this one. I’d like to finish the book. I haven’t finished it.”

Margaret said,

“I feel guilty if I’ve read the book and didn’t get off my butt to give it back. But I don’t feel it’s a penalty if I haven’t finished reading the book and used it during that time that I kept it overdue. I don’t know how anybody else would feel about it but it goes back to the agreement with the person who signed the book out and how they feel.”

In my interview with Len and Jill, Jill commented,

“I pay more fines than Len does. I think that the money collected becomes a very small part of the bottom line. So I think fines help support the library. And it also

³² This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

encourages those of us who are delinquent to get our books back. There's motivation because when you come back in and you have a fine, it's like 'Oops!'"

Len added,

"I've always been preoccupied about making darn sure I got my book back on time because I psychologically consider that if I walk in there with a book that's overdue, somebody is going to think that I am a bad person. I don't want some librarian knitting their brows and saying, 'And now you're going to have to pay!' It's that walking out with your back hunched after you have been figuratively chewed out. The other part of it is that if you suspect that you've taken a book back late, there's hesitation about going to the library the next time because you might be facing a fine. Now the Internet is a big deal because now you can find out without talking to anybody whether you have a fine and then maybe talk your wife into paying for it for you because she gets fines all the time and doesn't care."

I think Len's comment is an interesting example of the pervasiveness of the "discourse of fear." Len does not want to be overpowered by "some librarian" with knitted brows. I think it is also interesting that the panoptic technology can now be reversed and customers can use technology to find the information they want from the same surveillance system that the Library uses to calculate fines. In other words it is possible for them to become "self-monitoring subject[s]" (Campbell & Carlson, 2002, p. 590).

Although regular users seem not to be too concerned about fines, I think fines actually turn some people away from the library. As Denise said,

"I think that they will pay the fine once or twice but I think by the third time they're either going to bring their books on time or they're not going to use the library anymore. I forget what mine was. It may have been \$13.50. But whatever it was it was just painful to give the money. It was painful. Because you looked at the book and you thought, 'I could have bought that book cheaper than this nonsense.'"

In chapter seven I will suggest ways that, because our surveillance system has panoptic knowledge of what people have out on loan and overdue, we could eliminate library fines.

6.4. Social Problems and Moral Panics

When I asked a board member whether he had had any experience of people trying to solve social problems by raising moral panics, he said,

“You can’t talk to a politician who hasn’t seen something of that nature, whether it be a big box store that going to cause all the local businesses to fold or it’s some mega-home going in and everyone’s property values are going to go down. The scare message has always been a method that people have used to try to rally the cause. ‘If we don’t do something to stop them there’s going to be consequences.’ That doesn’t surprise me. So whether it’s pornography or the evils of the Internet or whatever, the presentation of the message is often like that. ‘There’s a danger here and you’ve got to help us stop it.’”

John seemed to be using a moral panic approach himself when, commenting on people’s different beliefs, he added,

“There are standards that need to be adhered to. The world for a good many decades and centuries had some standards. In general, society believed there was a certain line drawn between what was acceptable and what was unacceptable. That line is being moved so that what was formerly unacceptable is now shifting into the acceptable part. It’s because we as a society have gone away from majority rule to the minority getting the attention. The minority are allowed to have things approved on the basis of, if this group says it’s OK, let it go. We won’t go into specifics on that but I’m sure you know what I’m talking about. I think if that continues the way it is, the difficulties that society is having will continue on a downward spiral and the end result will be disaster.”

I interpret this comment as being a moral panic approach because John suggests that if we do not reintroduce “standards” the result “will be disaster.”

I think Isabel was describing moral panics when she said,

“There was another example in the Fraser Valley when *ExtraWest*, which is the homosexual gay magazine, was placed in the library. There was a huge outcry and it was withdrawn. Then there was another huge outcry and it was back in.”

I interpret Isabel as describing two contradictory moral panics. The first one was when one group created sufficient moral panic about the harm the donated magazine would do to family values to force the library to withdraw the magazine. The second one was when another group created sufficient moral panic about the harm withdrawing the magazine would do to intellectual freedom to force the library to reinstate it. Both moral

panics seemed to be related to contradictory modern metanarratives—family values against intellectual freedom.

While there have been many instances of moral panics about library materials in the past (Book and Periodical Council, 2003), in recent years the most common subject of moral panics in libraries seems to have been pornography on library Internet stations. This seems to have affected both board members and staff. For example, a board member commented,

“The Internet—deciding what do about the Internet in the library was a difficult time for me too. You’d almost want to throw the baby out with the bathwater because you didn’t want the library Internet stations used for pornography. To think that some person who wanted to see pornography and didn’t have money to buy a computer would come to our library to see it is upsetting. It must have been hard on the staff.”

Isabel used the example of an explicitly sexual television program as the jumping off point for her comment,

“And I’m sure that when customers come to the library, it’s that same feeling when they see someone else looking at pornography on an Internet screen. They’re shocked because the library is not where they go to see that kind of stuff. They would never choose to go to an Internet station and use it for that purpose in the library so they don’t want it in their face. They’re probably not going to object if an adult is doing it in a more private area in the library and they don’t know about it. They probably don’t care. But they would care if it was a child maybe. But on the whole they don’t want it in their faces.”

People seem not to agree about what constitutes pornography. A number of stakeholders suggested that pornography is seen differently by different cultures. For example, Alice commented,

“If you go to any classical building you’ll see this sort of thing [explicit sex] on the friezes and so on.”

Isabel agreed,

“When you go to Europe and look at afternoon television there, their soap operas are definitely what North Americans would think of as fairly pornographic. Or, in the case of another library, we heard a story of some young Asian lads who came into the library, discovered some pornography on an Internet station, thought it was the greatest stuff ever, rushed home, told their fathers and brought their

fathers back into the library to look at it because, in their culture, it's perfectly acceptable for young boys and fathers to look at pornography together. So what's acceptable is different culture to culture."

Len also commented on the different standard in Europe,

"When I was in Denmark, they had bookstores all over the place that had some of the most unimaginable material you've ever seen in your life. Yet, within their society, it seemed to work. I don't understand what the difference is but there is a different sense over there about how their society operates from what we have here. Yet, it appears to work."

Paul made a similar comment,

"The cultural values of our society have changed so much in the last fifty years that there's a significant generation gap and even though seniors have been exposed to these cultural changes, the fact they grew up with certain standards is going to influence them forever. Similarly there are major differences globally with respect to culture and when people immigrate they tend to bring a lot of those values with them. You put all that together and there has to be a huge difference."

The issue of Internet pornography appears fairly frequently in recent literature related to public libraries. For example, Molz and Dain (1999) state that librarians must cope "with the protection of intellectual content" (p. 146) at the same time as they deal with "citizen protest over the possible damage incurred by minors in encountering inappropriate material on a public library terminal" (p. 150). Dowlin and Shapiro (1996) comment, "Expanding use of the Internet presents a unique challenge to the librarian's ethic of intellectual freedom" and point out that "the potential for children to gain access to graphically explicit sexual content.... It will take considerable debate by libraries and communities to resolve this issue" (p. 179). None of these authors see an easy resolution to the public library's conflicting roles of guardian against censorship and safe place for children. Curry (1997) suggests that the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States share intellectual freedom issues regarding "material offensive to ethnic or religious groups, control of sexual material, and selection policies in general" and suggests that both library literature and the general media "portray a profession and a society for whom these issues and similar issues remain unresolved" (p. 3).

Before I became interested in how postmodern thought can influence our views of public libraries, I also thought that, in the age of the Internet, balancing libraries' responsibility for protecting intellectual freedom with their responsibility to provide a safe place for children had placed libraries in a difficult predicament. I thought that setting up carefully worded policies that place responsibility on parents for what children do in the Library and establishing areas for Internet stations where people could view information in privacy was the best way to solve the dilemma.

I now find that postmodern thought offers other ways of thinking about this. For example, if we were to view libraries' responsibility to protect intellectual freedom as simply an example of a modern metanarrative, it would be possible for librarians to look at this metanarrative incredulously and simply forbid the viewing of anything anyone thinks is pornography. In chapter seven I will talk briefly about Internet pornography in the Regional Library.

6.5. Significant Groups and Service to Rural Areas

Many of the branch heads commented on the marginalized people who come to their library branches, particularly disadvantaged teenagers and street people. For example, during focus group two, Eleanor talked about "kids with their back packs" who came into the branch during the summer to "hang out for a while." She added,

"They're just on the move. You can tell them because they haven't bathed recently."

Quentin commented,

"We get street people. Some of them are drunk and they're sleeping on the floor. One fellow was sleeping on the toilet. He was snoring. Somebody came and said, 'There's a guy snoring in the toilet.' I had to get a broomstick and go and poke him under the stall and wake him up. It took quite a while too. But when they finally come to they, 'Arrullarr.' 'Sorry buddy, you can't sleep in here. You have to get up and move.' Or they'll lie down. They'll find a back corner where they think it's quite safe and they'll lie down and go to sleep, more in the winter than now because it's rainy and cold."

Eleanor commented,

“But you almost have to have a place for these people. I really have no objection if they’re sleeping.”

In focus group three, Nancy mentioned a somewhat similar situation,

“Now we have a lot of street kids—older street kids—high school drop-outs aged say sixteen to twenty. They’re definitely not into reading. They come to the library because we have free computers. They get their library card and sometimes someone will say, ‘Doesn’t that kid have a life?’ We had one. He was there every morning when we opened. He was there when we closed. He was there Christmas Eve until we closed. He was there right afterwards. I said, ‘No. He doesn’t have a life except for right here at the library.’ He eventually made friends with the other guys and they got to be on a first name basis. Then, because our computers are quite close to each other, these kids learned what they were doing. Then somebody would sit down beside them and before you know it, the kids are helping them. They’re saying, ‘You do this or you do that,’ and they’re coming away feeling good. And because they can’t stay on the computer the whole time they’re there, they started walking around in the library and there were magazines and there were other things. It was really neat to watch. I think if we had said, ‘These kids are hogging the computers. We’ve got to get rid of them,’ we would have missed all that. We would have lost that in the library.”

Nancy also commented about seniors who came to her branch,

“Older people especially who have no one. They have no family and they are so old that all their friends have died already. Especially where we are now. The seniors have coffee at ten o’clock. They have their free coffee at the seniors centre and then they walk up the hill to the library and pretty soon you’ve got four or five and they’re all sitting in the magazines reading, but really they’re establishing new contacts. It’s the spot they come where, when they walk in the door, we know them and we can say hello to them.”

Patsy, a librarian, wrote on her response to the questionnaire that the most important contribution the Regional Library made to her community was that it was a “Great social equalizer.” When I asked Denise what she thought of that idea, she said,

“Yes it’s an equalizer. That’s a wonderful word. The library balances and equalizes. So a person who hasn’t the skills, because they have English as a second language, can go to the library and get as much help as somebody who has the money to go to the special stores. I love the idea that you introduce reading to little children because wouldn’t this be a sad world if they are all only computer nuts.”

A board member also made comments that were related to the use of the Regional Library by marginalized people. He said,

“Well it’s interesting for me because libraries have become no more valuable in my life today than they were then, personally—but I think to the community as a whole they are one of the most valuable things that exist.... Partly because it provides something for everybody. Partly because it’s something that people can use that costs them little or nothing. Although it costs the taxpayers something it’s still a small amount compared to everything else they pay for. The library user doesn’t even stop and think about the \$20 or \$30 or \$50 they pay in taxes. He sees it as something that’s inexpensive if not free. It’s there at all times. We talked on occasion about how when times are tough library use goes up—like now. That to me is an extremely valuable part of any operation. You’re there for people under every circumstance—to meet everybody’s needs in situations.”

Margaret, a First Nations woman, however, pointed out that libraries may not be as successful at serving First Nations. She said,

“The First Nations people who do use the library are very few and far between.... I think it’s what happened to them in school. How they feel about learning how to read. Reading isn’t a joy to them. It’s a burden. So when they sit down and read a book the story doesn’t come alive. They miss that. That’s an experience that you can’t share with someone else unless they experience it themselves. You can tell them and encourage them but until they get it, they don’t enjoy it.”

While the Vancouver Island Regional Library offers a safe place for some marginalized groups by allowing people to come in, it does not go out of its way to provide them with special service. Rather it seems to maintain a neutral stance towards customers by allowing anyone who wishes to use its services.

However, I think there is one marginalized group that the Regional Library does consciously reach out to, that is, people living in rural communities. As mentioned in chapter one, Vavrek (1995a) defines a public library as rural if it serves a community of no more than 25,000 people (p. 37). Given that definition, all but one of the communities within the Vancouver Island Regional Library area is rural. This suggests that 35 out of the 37 Regional Library branches are rural libraries. Some, such as the new 12,500 sq. ft. branch in Courtenay are large, beautiful, award-winning facilities. Others, such as the former portable bunkhouse in Woss or the 294 sq. ft. room attached to a heritage Post Office in Union Bay, are small and less attractive. Nonetheless, most

of the staff and other stakeholders who are associated with rural communities made positive comments about their branch library. For example, Gayle, a branch head in a Queen Charlotte Islands branch, answered the question (on the questionnaire) regarding what she most valued about the Regional Library by writing,

“I value the opportunity it offers to people in isolated communities. The huge range of books one can access through requests and inter-library loans is invaluable to those with no large public or university library.”

Irene, another Queen Charlotte Islands branch head, answered,

“I am told that our library is appreciated in our community. Some people would be very lost without the service that is provided by VIRL. Our town has diminished to approximately 400-450 members. Of those about half (or less) are members of VIRL. I’m working on bringing that number up, but it takes time. The library allows people to keep up to date in their interests, educate themselves, entertain themselves, and even just get out to a public place (other than a pub). We are extremely isolated. Having access to the resources the library provides is all some people have for entertainment (and sanity).”

Deidre, a branch head from a remote North Vancouver Island branch made a similar comment,

“And in somewhere as isolated as my island community, it’s a lifeline. It’s a serious lifeline. I have people walk in and say they couldn’t stay in the community unless there was the library and they mean it and I understand that. They use the computers and they take videos out all the time and they order books. So much of their social life is using the library.”

Lucy, another North Island branch head, wrote that she valued,

“Equality of service—a real effort to make service in small, rural, remote areas comparative to that in more urban centres.”

Marlene, a customer who uses Lucy’s branch, said during her interview,

“I don’t think I could live in my small community if there wasn’t a library. I think I’d have to move. I guess I could get together and exchange books with other people who have the same taste as me but it wouldn’t be the same³³ .”

³³ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

Not all comments were positive. Amy, a branch head from a North Island community wrote,

“I know the bigger communities have population and the larger libraries need to have extras. I feel the smaller libraries seem to do without and whenever new things are tried or tested it is most often the larger branches. I guess equality is what I would like to change. I always feel cheated after I have made a visit to the larger libraries.”

Lucy also wrote,

“I would like more open hours in small, remote branches. Costs for rent, heat, light, phone, etc. are constant, whether the branch is open 2 days or 6. It’s relatively cheap to make our services available to rural customers on schedules more like their urban counterparts.”

Howard Overend (2001), who worked in a variety of rural libraries in British Columbia during the 1950s through to the 1980s, comments on the work of Helen Gordon Stewart, who founded the three regional libraries in British Columbia. He says,

Helen Gordon Stewart’s record of achievement is... truly magnificent. Her work was a seminal force in the ruralization of public library service in Canada and abroad, showing that a large tax-supported unit of service (a single-purpose authority) was the most effective way to serve the library needs of people in several autonomous communities at the lowest cost. (p. 18)

Of course I am biased and I agree with Overend’s evaluation of regional libraries. I think that because of economies of scale and bureaucratized structures, integrated regional libraries can bring a full range of sophisticated library services to rural communities at a lower cost than can be achieved by libraries on their own or even by loosely knit federated systems.

However, I think we need to move away from this sort of modern rhetoric. Although it warms the hearts of those of us who work in regional libraries it is not necessarily persuasive to others. Likewise statistics that prove regional libraries are better are not meaningful if they neglect the specific non-quantifiable interests of people who seem to have been marginalized because they are rural. I think it might be useful

for us to think more carefully about the unique library needs of people in small, rural communities. As Ken wrote on the questionnaire,

“[We need] more control for isolated libraries to have organized programs and to maintain a ‘unique feel’ according to community wants and needs.”

In the period of time since I conducted my interviews and focus groups, I have led the Regional Library through a staff reorganization which included assigning more librarian time to all the branch libraries and especially the smaller, more remote ones. I think this pragmatic strategy might not have been thought of if, in researching this thesis, I had not looked at the Regional Library in terms of the postmodern notion that marginalized people are important.

6.6. Feminism and the Staff of the Regional Library

Most of the people who work for the Vancouver Island Regional Library are female. When I asked some of the stakeholders why they thought that was and whether they thought libraries would be different if they were run by men, I received a variety of responses. For example, Len said,

“There has to be a condition that causes there to be women in the library system and not men. But what that is I can’t say.”

Marlene said,

“I think it’s because librarians are like secretaries and nurses. In the past, it was one of the things that it was acceptable for women to do. I also think working in the library might be seen as a safe job³⁴.”

John said,

“I think there is something about the feminine psyche and intelligence and intellect that lends itself well to operating libraries.”

Bonnie said,

³⁴ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

“But there are certain jobs that attract women. You don’t see many men as secretaries or that sort of thing either. Why that is I don’t know. Maybe it doesn’t look challenging enough to a man from the outside.”

Paul said,

“Maybe women perceive libraries as safe places to work. They won’t have to compete with men, which is generally true. Men may look at it as a demeaning type of job. It’s bookish. It doesn’t fit the male stereotype. I think that’s more what’s going on.... Actually it’s kind of interesting when I think about that. When I think about people who work in bookstores I don’t think there’s that kind of split and when I think about people who own bookstores, certainly a lot of them are businessmen.... Personally I don’t have any bias about why it should be men or women. I was more making an observation that I think that’s kind of where it came from. In the bookstore context, it’s a sales job. It’s a business and I don’t think it has the same connotation for males getting involved in it. I think that’s really what we’ve been seeing.”

I interpret all these comments as coming from the modern perspective because they all offer reasons for why most of the people who work in libraries are female. Postmodern thought distrusts cause and effect and would not jump so quickly to answers. However, I think it is interesting to note that, while postmodern thought tends to distrust causal relationships, it does tend to construct causal accounts in human affairs in terms of reasons why people do certain things. Of course, the way I asked the question almost called for cause and effect answers. I think this is another illustration of how my own thinking has evolved over the course of doing this research. I also think it is interesting that the main reason given for this phenomenon is that women are weaker than men. Women work in libraries because they want to be safe, they don’t want to compete with men, they aren’t entrepreneurial. In other words, I think these comments suggest perspectives that have not been influenced by modern feminist theory, let alone postmodern feminism.

In contrast, Denise said,

“Everyone knows a librarian is not a man. How could it be a man? A man couldn’t stand around all day long and tidy up and make things pretty and type up letters. No it has to be a woman because a librarian is like a mother or a schoolteacher.... Men are normally creative thinkers on how to do a job so that it

doesn't take too much time to do it. So they'd create ways of not having to work too hard. They would probably have put in the smart cards. They would have put in the computers. They would have had the kiosks put in. They would never have wasted their time because they know that every moment they're alive is very valuable. As women, we never put enough value to our time. If men were cashiers in the grocery store, the checkout would have been made automatic. It would never have been the cashier's job to pick up the groceries and put them in the bag. The men would have had it down to a science because that's how they would have thought it all out. Women don't think that way. We don't put enough value to ourselves. We think that it's OK for us to do that because we're women. Men would say, 'No, no. Let me figure this out. I've got a better way of doing this.'"

I think this comment indicates that Denise has become conscious of modern feminism and thinks that women mistakenly think of themselves as less valuable than men.

Flo, a branch head also seemed to be influenced by modern feminism. She said, "You need to have a token male page if you can get one. We have and he's a wonderful fellow."

I interpret this comment as indicating an ironic perspective about the number of women working in the library. Since it sometimes suggested that male dominated organizations need to a "token woman" so that the organization can claim it is not prejudiced, the library needs a "token male" student worker. As a token person and a youth I think he may be seen as even less powerful than the relatively powerless women.

Since this thesis is an overview of how postmodern thought can offer new insights into understanding at least one public library, I cannot and did not delve deeply into library literature written from a feminist perspective. Much of the material I did find seemed to be from the position of carefully reasoned and researched modern feminism (Harris, 1992; Pritchard, 1994; Taylor, 1995). However, some postmodern library feminist literature does seem to be emerging. For example, after describing the contributions of modern feminists to library theory over the years, Hildebrand (2000) concludes with, what I think is, a postmodern feminist approach. She states,

An alternate future, however, can be imagined for our common past, one that draws from the best of traditional history and from the work on women, African-

Americans, other racial and ethnic groups as well as the lesbian community. Before such a history can emerge, however, a new and better way of conceptualizing these socially constructed aspects of our identity is needed. In any given setting one may take precedence over others, though none is ever totally submerged. (p. 61)

Kerslake (1999) also seems to take a postmodern perspective suggesting,

A discursive approach is useful... in offering a framework in which it may be argued that women workers are constructed as lesser than men—rather than being *intrinsically* of less value—and that this construction is used to justify their lower remuneration.... this discursive analysis argues that women were paid less than men because such exploitation was seen as legitimate in achieving the aim of public library expansion. (pp. 56-57)

I think it is interesting that, despite taking what I think are clearly postmodern approaches, neither of these writers identify themselves with postmodernism. I also think it is interesting that anti-feminist articles still appear in the literature and will discuss this phenomenon further in chapter seven.

I asked a number of stakeholders if they thought libraries would be different if they were mainly operated by men. Marlene answered,

“Not necessarily. As long as the people who ran libraries loved books and were sociable—even gregarious—I think libraries would be the same. It takes a certain type of person to be a librarian. They shouldn’t be snooty³⁵.”

Alice, a librarian, made a comment which suggests that she appears anything but “snooty,”

“I think that there’s something about people who work in libraries that makes them look approachable. I have never gone into a store like Eatons or the Bay [Canadian department stores] or anything in a mall without someone coming and asking me for help, ‘Can you come and help me?’”

This “universally helpful” image described by Alice is not the image that librarians have in the media. John commented,

“Librarian is often portrayed in the media, in movies. In people’s minds I think there is certain type of person that is often looked at as the librarian—cultural, educated, introverted, a people-person within the realm of their own area of

³⁵ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

expertise but probably a little more reserved outside in the big world. I suppose that's partly my view of librarians."

When I asked John if he thought librarians fitted the stereotype he said,

"No. I think from what I've seen all the people who work in the library system now have moved a long way away from that old stereotypical image."

Staff were also aware of the librarian stereotype. For example, the following interchange occurred during the second focus group,

Quentin: "I'm just thinking of the stereotypes of the librarian."

Eleanor: "The bun and the glasses and Peter Pan collars."

Quentin: "The very severe look and somebody bringing in a book and their getting chastised because the book is a day late."

Charles had written on the questionnaire, "Gone is the image of a stuffy librarian sitting there and telling everyone to shhhh." In the third focus group, I asked the group if they thought this image had ever been real. The following conversation took place:

Nancy: "Oh I tried to emulate it. When my eyes started going bad, I got the little reading glasses! And I was growing my hair in a bun! This bun with the little glasses on the end of the nose! 'I'm going to be a librarian!' Yes. I think the image has gone."

Deidre: "I think it has too. I have constant comments about how I don't fit the stereotype of a librarian."

Amy: "I don't think it's gone everywhere."

Deidre: "It's still commented on a lot."

Nancy: "They're always surprised by reality."

Deidre: "My friends from fishing—I was on the boat for eighteen years—if I run into somebody now and they ask me what I'm doing and I say I work in a library, they say, 'You—work in a library!' and then they just laugh their heads off."

Penny: "I guess the image is still there."

Deidre: "Yes. I would say it's still there."

I interpret these comments as indicating that the branch heads are aware of the stereotypical image of librarians and try to prove that it is not reality.

The librarians also acknowledged that they were aware of this issue. For example, Beth said,

"Librarians have always had an image problem. There was a great debate that went on endlessly at library school about how to change the image of librarians. How to get a more professional image."

Articles complaining about the way the media portrays librarians and suggesting ways librarians can improve their image appear quite frequently in the literature. For example, Liebold (1997) discusses the film, *Party Girl*, which is about “a young woman... who knows how to have a good time” and who is convinced she will “find salvation if she works as a librarian.” The article lists movies that feature positive and negative images about librarians and library workers and suggests ways that librarians can improve their “staid image” by showing their human side. Cullen (2000) describes Rupert Giles, a character in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as “one of the most negative and oversimplified images of a librarian ever depicted by the entertainment industry.” Giles “is not heroic because he is a librarian—he is heroic despite being a librarian.” Cullen sees the image of librarians as requiring attention because “if future politicians, university deans, and other fund managers are brought up on a diet of popular movies and TV shows that never realistically portray the services librarians offer, none of them will value our skills and expertise enough to keep us in business.” Hutchins (2000) is concerned that “not only does our image problem keep our salaries low and public knowledge of our profession to a minimum, it prevents our growth and future success” (2000, p. 57). G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford’s (1997) assessment of “responses to the stereotype, such as their being ‘wrong,’ ‘inaccurate,’ or ‘unfair,’” is that these sorts of responses are “expected, trite and futile” (p. 263). I tend to agree.

Adams (2000) takes an interestingly different approach. She suggests that librarians should stop worrying about negative stereotypes and explore how stereotypes are produced and how they can be dealt with. She suggests that

Cognitive psychologists and philosophers assert that we understand the world by mentally referring individual objects, people, and events to larger general classificatory schemes.... The use of types is a key cognitive activity by which

people understand their environment. Stereotyping, though, involves not only exaggerating and simplifying characteristics but also separating the normal and acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable. (p. 293)

She suggests that the female librarian stereotype is “part of a broader notion that says intelligent women cannot be physically attractive” (p. 293). Since the stereotypical representation of librarians suggests that they are abnormal and marginalized,

librarians would be well served to borrow the tactics employed by other marginalized groups.... Specifically, through the appropriate gestures of parody and mimicry, librarians can change the associations made with the old maid and transform this representation into something positive. (p. 291)

She likens this to “gays and lesbians appropriating the term ‘queer’” and “feminists strategically redeploying the term ‘bitch’” (p. 292). In other words, librarians should take the stereotypical image and, by making it their own, transform it into something else.

G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford (1997) suggest a different way of explaining the librarian stereotype based on insights from Foucault and modern feminism. Turning to Foucault, they suggest that the library can be viewed as “an institution that serves in the management of ‘fear.’ This fear is not a fear of libraries and librarians per se... but a more fundamental fear of discourse and the dangers that uncontrolled discourse can give rise to.” The library deals with the “discourse of fear” by “providing a space where discourse can be kept” and by guarding “against the possible dangers of uncontrolled discourse through complex mechanisms of order: indexes, catalogs, controlled vocabularies, and retrieval systems” (p. 260). Since they control the “discourse of fear” it seems reasonable to see libraries as institutions of considerable power.

Turning to modern feminism, G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford (1997) suggest,

The stereotype of the female librarian can be thought of as a strategy in which this fundamental fear can be managed, defused, and disguised. The female librarian is presented as fearsome, but, beneath the stern exterior, there is nothing to fear; there is only a woman.... The stereotype of the female librarian is ultimately one

of victim. Female librarians are not gods who create and control the overpowering rationality of the library's space of knowledge. The stereotype is a front that defuses the power of and fear of this rationality.... It is the rationality that controls the librarian. (p. 261)

Before I became interested in postmodern thought I sometimes wondered why the negative image of librarians persists. I also wondered why so many women seem drawn to becoming librarians and library workers. I now think that looking at this issue from postmodern perspectives about simulacra, cause and effect, and feminism can offer some new insights.

First, according to Seidman (1998), Baudrillard describes simulacra as

signs that function as copies or models of real objects or events.... Simulations have no referent or ground in any reality outside themselves. Postmodernity is organized around such simulations. From model homes to models of urban planning, good sex, masculinity, fashion, and personal identity, social reality is structured by codes and models that produce the reality they claim to merely represent. (p. 230)

The concept of stereotypes seems to have been in existence long before Baudrillard developed his concept of "simulacra." However, I think that librarian stereotypes can also be seen as simulations of librarians that emerge from the media and have become widely recognized part of the postmodern social condition. These simulations seem not to refer to real librarians but to exist in the media along with other stereotypical simulations of tough police detectives, harried doctors, manipulative lawyers, demanding teachers, bold starship captains, and frightening vampires. Although there are also portrayals in the media that are more individualistic, I think these stereotypes continue to be reproduced in the media. No stereotyped group seems to have an

effective way of countering these images because, as Baudrillard says, “the media and especially television accord no right of reply” (Smart, 1992, p. 134)³⁶.

Second, postmodern thought distrusts the direct flow of cause and effect (Fox, 1995; Rosenau, 1992, p. 67). If we adopt a position that cause and effect are uncertain at best, Hutchins’ (2000) argument that “if future politicians, university deans, and other fund managers are brought up on a diet of popular movies and TV shows that never realistically portray the services librarians offer, none of them will value our skills and expertise enough to keep us in business” ceases to be meaningful. It is just not as simple as Hutchins suggests it is. Things other than stereotypical media portrayals of librarians also affect politicians, deans and fund managers. Hutchins comments seem very close to an expression of moral panic.

Third, postmodern feminist thought can add to our understanding of the Regional Library in at least two contradictory ways. On the one hand, we can see the women who work in the Vancouver Island Regional Library as individuals who do not share a core gender identity. For example, a female senior manager at Central Services in Nanaimo probably has more in common with a male senior manager than she has with a part-time female student page in a remote community. On the other hand, we can also see both the women and men who work for the Vancouver Island Regional Library as being very similar. As predominantly white, middle class, English-speaking, and literate, we share “common psychological dispositions, cultural values, [and] social positioning” (p. 264). We do not reflect the increasingly multicultural society in which the Vancouver Island

³⁶ This seems to have changed somewhat. Call-in shows allow some interaction. With the advent of email it is possible to comment on a television news show and possibly have your comment appear on a subsequent program. Likewise fans’ websites for some television shows allow for interaction.

Regional Library is now situated. Perhaps this affects the service we are able to provide and our role in the communities in ways that are more significant than the fact that we are mainly women with a negative stereotypical image. In chapter seven, I will talk briefly about issues of gender in the Vancouver Island Regional Library.

6.7. Culture and the Regional Library's Collection

The stakeholders' views about culture emerged in a number of ways. One way was in their comments about the value of reading versus the value of television watching and the distinction between different types of television programs. For example, Amy mentioned her reply to a staff member, who had criticized an older boy for reading "baby books" to gain points for the summer reading program,

"I said, 'You know, you may not like it but, guess what he's doing, he's sitting there reading. He's not at home in front of the television.'"

John made a related comment,

"Going to the library and taking advantage of the library is hugely more valuable in people's lives than sitting at home watching the boob tube. I think the TV has become a detriment to our society health-wise, education-wise, and as far as useful use of time. I think we have become so used to parking ourselves in a chair and watching the nonsense on TV. I'm very disgusted with a lot of what's on TV. There are probably times when I would say that I disagree with some of the things in the library but 99.9% of it is so much more valuable than what you gain by sitting watching the TV—except if you take the time to use the TV set as a tool and watch the *Discovery Channel* or *A&E* or the *Knowledge Network*. There are some very good programs there that, in my mind, are in the same category as the library."

During focus group three, Deidre, a branch head, said,

"My customers still draw a line. They're not quite as snobby about television as they were in the past because they like the *Two Fat Ladies* videos and those kinds of things. They love that stuff and the *Sister Wendys* and the *Poirots* and now with all the classic movies coming in, people are having a hoot with those. They are ordering everything. The most intellectual customers that we have rent movies all the time."

Nancy replied,

“People always say, ‘I watch TV. I watch the *Knowledge Network*. I watch the *Discovery Channel*.’ I think there’s an element of TV snobbery.”

Paul also commented on the different types of television programs,

“But there are two different categories here. One is PBS, informational kind of stuff. The other is just recreational. For recreational stuff there really aren’t too many books that I could read in an hour and a half. So if I’m looking for a package of recreation then a movie’s great. Nothing wrong with that. But if I’m looking for something with more depth, then yes there are TV series that you can watch two hours every night for a while and that works too. And that’s not atypical of a book. I can think of series like *Babylon Five* and *Deep Space Nine* where you actually had a plot that ran over five years. And it was a fairly complex plot. I might add that the authors who put those together are topnotch and they’ve got some excellent books to their credit.”

I interpret these comments as expressing a modern view of culture since they all suggest that some types of culture, notably book reading or television with “depth,” are more valuable than others, notably watching popular television programs. A postmodern view of culture, on the other hand, suggests that the distinction between different types of culture is meaningless. For example, Seidman (1998) suggests that “culture saturates society” and that “high culture is just one aspect of culture. The study of culture must include popular culture (e.g. mass circulation magazines, newspapers, books, movies, television, and popular music)” (p. 200).

The modern view also emerged in stakeholders’ comments about different types of books. The branch heads in focus group three commented on the ways their customers rated the books they borrowed. Deidre said,

“Oh there’s a thing between mystery readers and non-fiction or literature or Canadian authors or all those kinds of things.”

Nancy replied,

“That’s right. I know people that take out eight romances—especially if they’re *Harlequins*—and people don’t take *Harlequins* the way they used to. But they almost apologize when they take them out. ‘Oh I shouldn’t read this. I know that—but I have these two big fat books’ and I’m sure they got those big fat books and they just carry them back and forth to the library.”

I asked some of the stakeholders whether they thought the Regional Library should have more bestsellers like Danielle Steele or more classics like the works of Jane Austen. Jill replied,

“I think that they are equally important. I happen to read ‘trashy romance novels’ but I’ve also read Jane Austen. I read Charlotte Bronte’s books, *Ben Hur* and other classics. You’re going to get people who read everything and anything. I think it’s important to have both the classics and Danielle Steele because people who read Danielle Steele may have read the classics or they may progress to the classics.”

I thought it was interesting that Jill, like the early public librarians, seemed to think that there might be a progression from Danielle Steele to Jane Austen. I asked her if that was what she had meant. She replied,

“No, because I started with the classics and now I just read trashy romance novels. Part of it is that I use reading as a recreation and I don’t want to have to think. We don’t have cablevision at home so I can’t hide myself in a trashy TV show. So I read romance novels voraciously. Yes, I have read classics like Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte. I didn’t enjoy D.H. Lawrence but I read a lot of those books or tried to read them. I don’t think there is a progression. You can’t say that a person will definitely go either way. If they are an avid reader, they would have tried everything.”

I interpreted this as expressing a modern view of culture in that she distinguished between the “classics” and “trashy romance novels.” I also thought that she seemed to think that “trashy” books were better than “trashy TV.” Bonnie seemed to take an even more modern approach. She said,

“I think the classics are most important. There are a lot of people who like reading the no-brainer stuff. If you’re lying on the beach, you probably aren’t taking Jane Austen. You probably want some fluff. So there’s really a place for both. But the real keepers, the ones that will go down in history—those are the most important ones.”

Jessica also seemed to take modern approach when she said,

“The purpose of the library is to be something that is usable for everyone. So looking at society as multi-cultural, diversity probably is the best way to approach it. You have bestsellers because people look for them. But it’s also important to counter those with other options that may be just as interesting and maybe even better things that people wouldn’t necessarily find other places because they’re not looking for them.”

I interpret Bonnie and Jessica as having a modern perspective towards high and low culture because, despite saying the library should have a variety of materials, they seemed to see a distinction between “fluff” and “better things.”

When I first became a librarian I believed that public libraries should provide only the best materials. One of the first modern/postmodern themes that attracted me, when I began to be interested in postmodern thought and libraries, was the theme related modern and postmodern views of culture commented on by Molz and Dain (1999). These authors describe the ongoing debate over whether libraries should provide “popular culture, represented by the gradual inclusion of fiction and light reading” or whether they should support “the noble aim of the diffusion of knowledge” through the reading of “standard classical works and those having practical, educative, and vocational value” (p. 13). They mention that the Baltimore County Public Library’s decision to collect “not a broad array of materials that librarians feel users should read or use, but those materials which most users do read or use” (p. 29) occurred at a time “when literary standards and cultural canons were coming under attack in American intellectual circles” (p. 32). This seems to imply that Molz and Dain think that Baltimore County’s change to a popular materials collection was based, at least in part, in postmodern thinking about culture.

If we perceive all culture as being of equal worth and if public libraries are intended to serve everyone, it seems reasonable to follow the example of the Baltimore County Public Library and purchase materials that people want to read. It could even be argued that public libraries should buy and lend an even wider range of materials that would reflect an even wider diversity of cultural values.

Libraries are not perceived this way by some of the stakeholders. When I asked what part of society the Vancouver Island Regional Library appeals to, John said,

“The library appeals to everybody in the middle. I don’t think folks at the high end of the scale are interested. I think the attitude that seems to emanate from them would preclude them from using the library. They would see the library as beneath them. The guy at the bottom end of the scale, the lowbrow person that we talked about earlier, sees no need for the library, has no use for it, would find his time more valuably spent sitting in a bar on a Friday night, or whenever he had free time, rather than going to the library.”

Katie, a librarian, said,

“It’s not necessarily a good thing but it’s what public libraries have evolved into. Not just VIRC I mean most public libraries have over half the people in their communities being cardholders. Within that there’s a huge range of education levels. But in terms of high brow and low, I’m not sure that this is good but it’s sort of where we are and we’re comfortable with it and, you know, you do your job day to day and you don’t really think about the big picture all the time.”

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why pornography on public Internet stations is so shocking to customers and librarians like Katie. Despite the fact that libraries are known to provide information on wide range of subjects, what is really expected is information for those in the middle. In the Vancouver Island Regional Library, those in the middle seem not to be interested in pornography.

Katie also commented on the types of materials she thought should be in the library,

“What I want [the library] to buy are things that are going to get used.... That’s my philosophy. A perfect example of something that many people would consider low brow is graphic novels which are a little bit more nicely bound and longer comic books. [They are] one of the few things that I can guarantee you will get widely used by a young adult population.”

When I asked if graphic novels would be considered low brow, she replied,

“Well I don’t care if they are—not at all.”

I interpreted the belief that public libraries are for people in the middle as once more reflecting a modern perspective on culture and cultural groups. Katie’s comment that she didn’t care if graphic novels were low brow seemed to be reflective of the view that reading something, no matter how “low brow,” is better than not reading at all.

However, it could also be interpreted as postmodern since it seems to ignore modern

views of high and low culture. Perhaps acceptance of the value of graphic novels expands the “middleness” of libraries somewhat.

Since I include the notion of multiculturalism within the modern/postmodern theme of culture, I also talked to the stakeholders about what they thought the library could do for the growing number of people moving into the Vancouver Island Regional Library area who may not speak English. Paul said,

“I don’t think we can really do anything special for one cultural group or another. I think about the range. We have the First Nations who have special cultural interests and maybe have some social disadvantages. We have a lot of immigrants from the Middle East, India, different parts of Europe, various parts of Asia, who all have their own cultural background. There is some commonality among those needing some assistance in learning English. As a public institution, I can see us trying to address that particular need. Beyond that I think we just respond generally to what our users want. If there is a demand for it, we attempt to fill it.”

John said,

“I think we need to have excessive amounts of Canadian history. We need to have excessive amounts of things that make Canada unique. I’m not sure what they all are. There should tons of information in that regard. Everything that we can do to help people to learn to speak English. That ought to be over-emphasized because I’m running into too many twenty and thirty-year residents of this country who cannot speak a reasonable amount of English... I guess it would be good if the library could somehow provide all the necessary tools for these folks to improve their ability to become full Canadians in their culture.”

I interpret both these comments as being expressions of a modern perspective on multiculturalism. Both stakeholders seem to assume that the hegemonic culture has more value than other cultures and that immigrants should learn how to participate the Canadian culture fully rather than continue to embrace the cultural traditions of their former homeland.

The librarians, on the other hand, seemed to think that the library has a responsibility to other ethnic groups which it is failing to carry out. For example Alice said,

“Well we have to be far more quickly responsive than we have been. We’ve been very slow to make changes and that’s because we’ve had somewhat of a static user patron profile here and that’s changing. When I first moved here in ’88 it was white middle-class. Even though there were a lot of hard-hat people here, everybody looked the same. There was no cultural diversity. Now we’re seeing lots more texture on the street. We’re hearing different languages. We’re being able to go to a Thai restaurant that actually is cooking real Thai rather than Americanized and we’re going to have to start being more responsive to these people.”

Beth commented,

“Personally I think that we’re under-serving a large segment of potential library users at the moment because we make very lame attempts to provide materials that will interest them. A lot of the foreign language material we have, we acquire by donation, and because we can’t read the language we don’t even know what it is. We just put it in the collection anyway. I find that a little disturbing.”

I think that these comments are reflective of a somewhat postmodern perspective on multiculturalism since they seem to recognize that other cultures have value. However, I interpret Beth’s comment that we do not evaluate foreign language materials as suggesting a modern view of other cultures’ literature. It seems that she thinks that just as English language materials vary in their quality, so too, some foreign language materials are more worthy of inclusion than others.

I think awareness of modern and postmodern views of culture can have an impact on public libraries and that if we were to broaden the scope of what libraries provide to more fully reflect the multiplicity of cultures in which we live, libraries might be seen and used differently. I will briefly mention this possibility in chapter seven.

6.8. Paranormal Beliefs, Religion and Library Cataloguing

I asked the librarian focus group how they thought materials on such subjects as feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, and palm reading fit with the other things that we have in the library for the purpose of providing accurate information. At that point I was calling the subject of these materials “premodern beliefs.” I have since realized that the term does not work because it conflates a chronological time period with a non-

scientific epistemology. I am now calling feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, palm reading, etc. examples of “paranormal beliefs.” My view was that these paranormal beliefs are based on unscientific understandings of the world and are therefore dissimilar from the materials purporting to offer accurate, scientific information. I expected the librarians to see the same distinction.

Katie’s reply was, “Well who’s to say it’s not?” She then went on to comment,

“I really meant it when I said, ‘Who’s to say.’ The whole gods, goddesses, earth worship, magic—I’m not going to say it’s real or not. There’s a lot that we can measure now that we believe is real that we wouldn’t have believed in before we could measure it. For example radio waves have always been around but until they were measured, in a sense, they didn’t exist. They weren’t true. But they were still there.”

To which Isabel added,

“And what about quasars and black holes?”

Beth concurred,

“They were a fantastical idea. They were some sort of mythic or magical beings.... Look at the things that have been proven to be real or true or accurate or they’ve been scientifically established. Three or four hundred years ago, people would have laughed hysterically if you had suggested it was possible we could put men on the moon or that we could know what Jupiter looks like and things like that. So maybe there are people who think, ‘Well you know...’”

I found these comments interesting because the librarians seemed not to differentiate between non-scientific paranormal beliefs (such as feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, and palm reading) and new scientific theory (such as quasars, black holes, and human exploration of the moon). Their comments seemed to imply that eventually paranormal beliefs and practices would be “measured” scientifically and their claims validated in some way. I interpret this suggestion as indicating a modern scientific perspective since the librarians were willing to rely on science to provide the criteria for judging truth. However, their blurring of the difference between paranormal beliefs and scientific theory seemed to indicate that, despite their modern stance, they did not understand how

modern scientists think science works. Shermer (2000), a well-known popular sceptic, suggests an explanation for this:

A Gallup poll conducted in 1991 revealed that half of all Americans believe in astrology and almost as many believe in extrasensory perception, or ESP; a third believe in the lost continent of Atlantis and in ghosts; and fully two-thirds believe they have had a psychic experience. Do we really live in Age of Science? We do, but we mostly partake of the fruits of science—technology—whereas fundamental principles of scientific thinking are often poorly taught and rarely employed. (p. 35)

I think that the librarians were ignoring “fundamental principles of scientific thinking” in their judgement of paranormal beliefs. Perhaps this is not surprising given the difficulty of differentiating between science and non-science. As Adamson (2001) says, “Science is not an abstract category. It cannot be clearly delimited from non-science by a few criteria” (p. A11). However, I think it is more likely that it was librarians’ neutral stance that was at play. Because they had adopted the belief that they must be unbiased, these librarians may have thought it inappropriate to distinguish feng shui from quasars.

Bonnie seemed to take a modern perspective about feng shui when she commented,

“I didn’t read up on it but I know my hairdresser was living by it totally. She had a mirror that had to face a certain way in a room. I was interested in the part where she was talking about the cleansing of the house. Heaven knows we need to do it in our house to get rid of all the excess. That was of interest to me. But when she started saying that she moved her furniture this way and her mirror faced that way, I thought, ‘I don’t think I quite buy all that.’”

I interpret Bonnie’s comments as being from the modern perspective because she did not give credence to the idea the feng shui was of value. She simply seemed to think of feng shui as a doubtful non-scientific belief and practice.

Interestingly, some writers about feng shui actually claim that feng shui is based on scientific principles. For example, Too (1999) writes,

Feng shui is best approached as a science and practised as an art.... If the proportions are accurately measured and the computations have been correctly

worked out, formula feng shui almost always works by improving the luck of residents. Results do not take long to manifest. But also remember that if practiced incorrectly, feng shui simply does not work! (p. 11)

I do not think that feng shui can claim to be scientific simply on the basis that it uses careful measurement and computation. However, I think Too's (1999) claim for feng shui illustrates the power of contemporary belief in positivist science. Shermer (1997) touches on this when he comments,

We live in an age of science. That is why pseudosciences flourish—pseudoscientists know that their ideas must at least appear scientific because science is the touchstone of truth in our culture. (pp. 6-7)

I think a typical librarian approach to feng shui and other paranormal materials is consistent with the approach used in a book review in *Library Journal* regarding a book by Brown about feng shui. Williamson (2002) writes,

Brown, whose *Practical Feng Shui Solutions* and *Practical Feng Shui* explained how *feng shui* can be used for self-improvement and in interior design, continues to give practical advice on how to incorporate this Chinese philosophy into one's life. Although the principles explained may take more than a weekend to master, this book furnishes clear, simple instructions that show how *feng shui* can be used. Purchase if there is an interest. (p. 94)

Williamson evaluates this book on its clear, simple instruction and suggests it should be bought "if there is an interest." This could be seen to represent a postmodern perspective because it does not concern itself with truth claims related to feng shui. However, as I have mentioned previously, I think it simply reflects librarians' modern uncritical belief in the neutral stance and the metanarrative of intellectual freedom.

When I asked Len and Jill what they thought about materials on feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, and palm reading being included in the Library, Jill said,

"I look at it from the point of view that the premodern, or whatever you want to call it, often times addresses people's spiritual needs.... And often times those particular philosophies help people explore that spiritual need. Those people have a need to know and understand in a different way. I would say that those types of books would have equal value to Darwin's theory of evolution. Len has a need to know in a scientific way whereas other people have a need to know in a way which will meet their spiritual needs."

I interpret Jill's comment as suggesting a postmodern viewpoint because she seemed to think that different belief systems were acceptable.

While some of the librarians seemed to accept that paranormal beliefs may eventually be proved to have a scientific basis, Alice seemed less accepting of the possible truth of religious belief. Her response to my question about feng shui, tarot, astrology, vampires, and palm reading materials was,

"I take the opposite point of view. We also have the *Bible*. We also have the *Koran*. Where is the empirical proof that that's accurate too?"

I interpret this comment as indicating a modern perspective because Alice seemed to be suggesting that for the Bible and Koran to be "accurate" we need empirical proof that what they describe really happened.

In contrast, Lou said,

"I'm not one to take the *Bible* totally literally. The teachings in the *Old Testament*, in particular, are not verifiable to the extent that we can say they are true. This is even true of the *New Testament*. When Christ spoke to the people, he was speaking to people who were not very well informed. So, he made every effort to give them a sense that what was being said was true and that it would apply to them and they could use it for themselves."

I interpret Lou's comments as being postmodern because he seems to be suggesting that the context influenced what is written in the *Bible*. Christ's words in the *Bible* are "biased" by the period during which he lived.

I think that modern positivists who wish to deal with their "spiritual needs" face a difficult dilemma. As Armstrong (2000) comments,

We cannot be religious in the same way as our ancestors in the premodern conservative world, when myths and rituals of faith helped people to accept limitation that were essential to agrarian civilization. We are oriented to the future, and those of us who have been shaped by the rationalism of the modern world cannot easily understand the old forms of spirituality. We are not unlike Newton, one of the first people in the Western world to be wholly imbued by the scientific spirit, who found it impossible to understand mythology. However hard we try to embrace conventional religion, we have a natural tendency to see truth as factual, historical, and empirical. Many have become convinced that if faith is

to be taken seriously, its myths must be shown to be historical and capable of working practically with all the efficiency that modernity expects. (p. 365)

This seems to be the position of people who believe in creation science. For example,

John spoke with great conviction about his belief in creation science. He said,

“I believe that there are as many, if not more, scientists who will prove to you without a shadow of a doubt that creation is the way this world came about from a purely scientific stand point. I’ve read a few books on it and it’s not too hard to figure out. When you listen to these well educated scientific minds, who understand all the intricacies, clearly enunciate how science can prove creation is the way this world came to be. So, although it comes out of all the religious organizations and groups that exist, it also is a scientifically backed issue as well—so it deserves the same place on the shelf as the evolutionary theory³⁷.”

I think that, like Too’s (1999) scientific claims for feng shui, creation science’s claim to scientific accuracy illustrates the power of contemporary belief in positivist science. As Armstrong (2000) comments, “The fundamentalist movements that have evolved in our own day have a symbiotic relationship with modernity. They may reject the scientific rationalism of the West, but they cannot escape it” (p. xiii). I think this is an example of how a discourse, in this case the pervasive discourse of positivist science, can describe the boundaries within which it is possible to think. However, I also think that people who adopt a postmodern understanding of truth, knowledge and belief can

³⁷ Number (1992) describes his understanding of the “science” behind “creation science” as follows, “The creation scientists... compress the history of life on earth into less than ten thousand years. To accomplish this, they attribute most of the fossil record to the brief period of the flood and its aftermath. The believe that most of the plants and animals buried sequentially in the stratified rocks once lived together in the antediluvian world; thus these relics do not represent successive populations of flora and fauna spanning millions of years.”

Pigliucci (2001) states that there are many variations of creation science. These include classical creationism and the neo-creationism. According to Pigliucci, “Essentially, most neo-creationists (among whom there is quite a bit of variation) do not believe in a young Earth, accept micro-evolution (though recently so do some classical creationists), don’t believe in the literal truth of the Bible, and don’t even call themselves creationists--the preferred term for their version of things is ‘intelligent design’ (some even go so far as to avoid stating just who this intelligent designer might be).”

see scientific, paranormal and religious views as different and unrelated lenses for viewing reality.

Paul discounted belief in creation science as being “fringe” and suggested that works on creationism should only be included in the library for their “historical perspective of what kinds of arguments these people were presenting.” I interpret Paul’s view as also being modern because it seems to be based in modern scientific theory. However, I do not think belief in creation science can be discounted as “fringe” since it appears to be held by large numbers of people. Shermer (1997) states,

A 1991 Gallup poll found that 47% of Americans believe that “God created man pretty much in his present form at one time within the last ten thousand years.” A centrist view, that “Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process, including man’s creation” was held by 40% of Americans. Only 9 percent believed that “Man has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life. God had no part in this process.” The remaining 4 percent answered “I don’t know” (Gallup and Newport 1991, p. 140). (p. 156)

Lou also commented on creation, saying,

“I think that there’s a combination of two things. God created the world and there may very well have been a Big Bang at some point. But there’s no clear marrying of the story of Genesis and the theory of evolution, as we know it to this point. But I think the two are still connected. I think there is a gap there. I can’t myself see how, if Adam and Eve were created, they were created in the likeness of men and women as we know them today. When the *Bible* was written, evolution never would have been accepted. . . . At some point God had a hand in making it all happen and there’s certainly the evolutionary component to that. So there has to be a marriage between creation and evolution at some point.”

While I do not interpret Lou’s comments as supporting creation science, I take his belief that there is a link between scientific and religious explanations of creation to be modern in the same way that creation science is modern.

Both Quentin and John expressed their concerns about the lack of creation science materials in the Regional Library. Quentin said,

“I guess. . . the one complaint that I’ve had is that the library has taken a very narrow view of. . . evolution or creation, which has become quite a hot topic in

schools.... I know our Society has published a number of books on the question, which I think are quite balanced actually, and tried to give the scientific evidence of creation. But it's very difficult to get it [a donated book on creation science] past the collection department and to get it catalogued so that people have the opportunity to get it. And I find that in some ways the library is very open—particularly to sexual things and so on.... But when it comes to certain things to do with religion or maybe thinking which is not as socially acceptable, it's very narrow minded. I would like to see the kind of the blinders taken off a little bit more and really live up to the guidelines which the library has set for itself—which are very good guidelines—which is not just to support any one view.”

John said,

“I do believe the library should show both sides. My sadness comes from the fact that our education system doesn't.”

Quentin also expressed his views about the way books on creation science are catalogued,

“I even see it in the ways in which things are catalogued that are hard to find. So that in some cases information is very easy to find because it's cross-referenced and it's under a number of subjects, whereas for other things you've got almost to know the exact title to find it and it almost seems to me it's a form of burying the book.”

In chapter five I mentioned a discussion with the librarian focus group about donated creation science books during which Alice said, “We put them in the correct place for cataloguing.” I understood at the time that, because books about creation science are based in a religious belief, they were catalogued somewhere in the Dewey Decimal Classification's (DDC) schedules for Religion. This would be consistent with the way creation science is handled in the public schools. However, when I checked the Vancouver Island Regional Library online catalogue, I discovered that approximately the same number of books on creation science were classified in the schedules for

Science as were classified in the schedules for Religion³⁸.

I asked a member of the first focus group why she thought this might be the case. She explained that, until 1999, cataloguing at the Regional Library was done by a cataloguing librarian who assigned DDC numbers and subject headings to all new

³⁸ Some examples of Vancouver Island Regional Library cataloguing and classification of works related to evolution and creation are:

Is God a creationist? (Fry, 1983) is classified as 213, the DDC number for “Creation.” The subject headings are “Creationism,” “Creation” and “Religion and Science.” This book suggests that scientific creationism is an attack not only on mainstream science but also on mainstream religion. The editors’ names are not included in the cataloguing and the full title is not given.

Genesis and the Big Bang: The discovery of harmony between modern science and the Bible (Schroeder, 1990) is classified 296.34, the DDC number for “Judaism.” The subject headings are “Bible and science” and “Creation.” This book suggests that, based on the theory of relativity, the week of Genesis is equivalent to billions of years of evolution. It attempts to be both scientific and religious.

Dictionary of Science & Creationism; Forward by Martin Gardner (Ecker, 1990) is classified 291.24, the DDC number for “Comparative Religion.” The subject headings are “Evolution and creation,” “Evolution—Religious aspects,” and “Creationism.” This book opposes creationism and is written from a scientific perspective. It gives scientific and creationist definitions for various terms related to evolution and creation. The fact that Martin Gardner wrote the forward is included in the title.

An evolving dialogue: Theological and scientific perspectives on evolution (Miller, 2001) is classified as 576, the DDC number for “Genetics and evolution.” The subject headings are “Evolution,” “Evolution (Biology),” “Evolution—Religious aspects,” and “Creationism.” The book is a collection of essays around the possibility of religious and scientific explanations of creation not negating each other. The author’s name and the place the book was published do not appear in the record.

Dinosaurs: Those terrible lizards (Gish, 1977) is classified as 567.91, the DDC number for “Fossil cold-blooded vertebrates.” The subject headings are “Evolution—Religious aspects” and “Dinosaurs.” While acknowledging the evolutionary approach, this book clearly promotes a biblical interpretation that humans and dinosaurs lived together on earth 10,000 years ago and that God created dinosaurs on the 6th day of creation.

The triumph of evolution and the failure of creationism (Eldredge, 2002) is classified as 599.938, the DDC number for “Mammalia.” The subject headings are “Human evolution” and “Creationism.” The book condemns scientific creationism because it is weakening people’s understanding of science.

materials. Depending on the knowledge of the librarian, the length of time available to catalogue each item, the cataloguing already done for similar items, the accuracy of the clerical staff who did the data entry, and the Library's adoption or non-adoption of changes within the DDC, items could be catalogued and classified in a variety of different ways. Even when the cataloguers realized cataloguing was not appropriate there was seldom time to redo it. For the past three years, the Regional Library has used a software product called *BookWhere* to search the online catalogues of approximately 600 member libraries and select cataloguing records to use on new materials. It seems that *BookWhere* often displays hundreds of records for the same item and that the records often differ from each other. Even the different departments in some large libraries catalogue the same book differently. She summed up with the comment, "We want to get it right but we don't have the time—and subject headings and classification are better or worse."

6.9. Waged Work and Uncertainty in the Regional Library

As I mentioned in chapter five, there are a number of different types of workers within the Regional Library. As well as senior management workers, professional librarian workers, clerical workers and technicians, there are part-time student workers (pages) and many casual or on-call staff. I think these groups correspond quite closely to Gorz's (1982) three categories of postmodern workers.

The senior management staff, librarians, branch heads of large branches and technicians can be seen as part of Gorz's "aristocracy of secure, well-paid workers." Although the wages received by these different types of workers vary considerably, they can all expect a regular biweekly paycheque and good benefits package. Or can they? Even senior staff are not entirely secure in the jobs. During the 2002 Regional Library

Reorganization³⁹, several senior people left the organization rather than taking on new positions.

The part-time clerical workers and casuals can be seen as part of Gorz's "growing mass of unemployed," perhaps better described in the Library as "under-employed." While some choose to be part-time or on-call because they have other interests, many part-time workers work their way into fulltime work.

The clerical workers at Central Services who say that their jobs are boring and unchallenging can be seen as part of Gorz's group for whom work does not represent "a source of identity or meaningful activity" (p. 179).

The potential for change seems to cause unease among the staff. On the questionnaire, Lorraine, a librarian, wrote about the Regional Library ten years ago,

"It may be my imagination, but there seemed to be a more stable atmosphere then and people didn't worry so much about losing their jobs. There has been a great deal of change recently, and I think that morale is much lower. Also, the economy was generally better then, I believe. There were always fluctuations in the economy of the North part of the Island, but not the closures and layoffs that communities are experiencing now."

Cynthia, also a librarian, wrote,

"10 years ago we weren't worried about losing branches to the Greater Victoria Public Library and subsequent job loss."

Patsy, a librarian, also commented that ten years ago the Regional Library was

³⁹ In the time since I did this research, I led a reorganization process that tried to streamline and reduce the Vancouver Island Regional Library's bureaucratic structure by eliminating one level of management, establishing cross divisional teams to plan important projects, and by budgeting and scheduling more opportunities at every level for staff to meet and discuss issues. The process of reorganizing was difficult. Since the professional librarians are unionized, it was not possible to simply slot everyone into a new position in the flattened structure. People had to be laid off in order for them to apply for, and fill, new jobs. The level of uncertainty during the summer of 2002 was high. In the end, four people left the organization. I shudder when I read things such as "despite the exponential growth in consultancies, books and articles on successful change management, most organizational change efforts fail" (Finlayson, 2002).

“Definitely [a] more humane place to work.”

I think that some of this pessimism about the lack of stable employment may be related to some staff’s belief, mentioned in chapter five, that books and therefore libraries may disappear from society. As Isabel wrote on the questionnaire,

“I guess the question is why are libraries duplicating these virtual services system by system when a provincial or national virtual library could theoretically do it for the whole province or country?... Scary thought! Maybe it will happen one day but not likely in the next ten years.”

On the other hand, I think that the majority of staff who work in the branches find satisfaction from the service part of their jobs. The library users I interviewed certainly seemed to value the service they receive from library staff. For example, in the interview with Lou and Bonnie, Bonnie said,

“I like the personal service. I don’t think I’d want an automated library system. Maybe it’s an old-fashioned thing with me. It is nice to have service—somebody to help you. It’s more personal and part of the friendliness and niceness of going to the library.”

Lou agreed,

“I’m the same way. I use the online catalogue but I wouldn’t want to be checking my own book out. I really enjoy the contact in the libraries. Bonnie alluded to it before. There’s a special ambiance in the library. It’s a centre for knowledge. It’s a centre for information. It’s a centre for certain activities. It’s part of the life of the community.”

In my interview with Len and Jill, Len said,

“Anybody I ever dealt with knew what they were doing. Certainly they knew more than I did. That might not be saying much and I don’t want to under-rate what the staff do. There always seems to be somebody who is more than willing to help. I never felt as if I was ignored or pushed aside or anything like that.”

Jill added.

“One day I asked for help and staff were really busy and the staff person said, ‘You need to use the catalogue.’ I said, ‘I did and I’m still having trouble.’ She was really busy so I more or less got the brush off at that time. But she did come and find me later and gave me a hand.”

I think one of the hidden modern benefits of a public library is the “niceness” that Bonnie talks about. Despite Internet pornography, overdue fines, the confusing classification system, and the negative image of librarians, all the branches of the Vancouver Island Regional Library seem to be “nice places” to go. Many staff commented on this in their responses to the questionnaire:

Amy: “It is a very comfortable and safe place.”

Deidre: “I hope it stays a safe, friendly place for people to enjoy books.”

Olivia: “I feel that the VIRL branches are a place for good information and knowledge, good books to read and enjoy, free Internet and friendly staff able and willing to help.”

Many branch heads expressed positive feelings toward their customers during the focus groups. For example, Quentin said about one of his regular customers,

“She’s very, very friendly and appreciative of service and always has her order ready for the large print books that she wants to read. We all know her and so she’s always welcome there and I think she enjoys it. Then she gets her books and goes and sits and reads for a while and then around 11:30 the Handy Dart [bus] comes back—so she’s usually there for about an hour and a half.”

Deidre who is branch head in a small remote community commented,

“A lot of the new customers that we get are people that have just moved to the community. They’ll say, ‘I’ve spent my whole life in a library.’ And they’ll walk in and they’ll go, ‘Oh! This is a wonderful place’ and you can feel that they just have that warm feeling of being somewhere that they can trust—that they can just wander around and touch and feel and... it is really cool... because I bet that comment is made more often than anything... I cannot believe how much my customers appreciate me. I get so much positive feedback. Older people especially—they love the vital feeling. They love that warmth and friendliness in there and I just marvel. That makes me feel really, really good.”

Nancy also said,

“It’s the spot they come where when they walk in the door we know them and we can say hello to them. They really just like someone that says, ‘Oh, I haven’t seen you in for awhile, were you sick?’ And then they tell you all about it. But I mean it’s still good to do that. You feel really good about your customers.”

Of course not all customers are seen in such a positive light. Deidre said,

“I would say about eight-tenths of the customers that come in are really genuinely nice people.”

Nancy agreed,

“That’s right. And the other two are just characters. They’re always really grouchy but they’re just characters.”

Branch work also seems to have its frustrations and some of the branch heads described “small grumbles” about some of the routines they are required to follow.

Irene, a branch head and CUPE member, wrote on the questionnaire,

“The biggest change I would make is that before changes in the manuals or signs are printed for all the branches that they be checked one last time for errors or omissions. It takes time and resources when replacing pages that have just been put in because errors were noticed or changes made again after printing. I know that keeping manuals and notices up to date is a huge task but we go through so much paper in our small branch—also from those never ending CUPE notices of job postings along with job descriptions and then the postings of the successful applicant. It should be sufficient to be posted on the VIRL web page, not pages and pages of unwanted faxed notices every week. I know this is a CUPE thing, but I find handling all forms of unwanted paperwork a nuisance.”

Olivia, branch head of a mid-sized branch, commented,

“Manual clerical work carried on ‘behind the scenes’ by branch staff and Branch Heads is, quite frankly from the Dark Ages! All Branch Heads need a computer to calculate the many varied daily and monthly monies taken, circulation statistics, Internet statistics, etc. etc., which need to be sent to Central Services or the Area Manager as necessary. Branches also need better ways to calculate monies taken during the day. In our branch we have little separate boxes, as well as a cash box so that at the end of the day we know how much is taken individually for fines, book sales, Internet Visitor cards, photocopy money, lost/damaged items, etc. We are all pretty skilled at giving change, but how much easier if we had a till to do it for us!”

I think Olivia’s comment suggests a belief that technology will solve the annoying clerical duties that are part of the work.

In many ways technology has improved clerical work. For example, Brenda, a branch head from a small, remote branch, wrote on the questionnaire,

“We are now online and keeping up to date with society’s techno world, somewhat less personal contact since the computer is the go-between but faster, easier, more time for other library needs.”

Juliet wrote,

“1990 was the year we automated; made life way easier for everyone—customers and staff with regard to finding and placing holds on items. I feel the branches have become much more efficient and we are able to serve customers faster in most things.”

Lucy wrote,

“Speed is a huge difference. A book request 10 years ago was faxed to HQ (a big improvement over mail, as the microfiche catalogue was over print catalogues) faxed to the sending branch and mailed to the requesting branch. Dynix (and customer internet placed holds) has made the process much faster producing more satisfied customers, encouraging more use of the request system.”

Olivia also praised the technological improvements,

“I think that the main differences between public libraries 10 years ago compared to now are the ready access to the Internet and the automation of most branches. 10 years ago VIRL did not issue library cards. It was a matter of trust when a customer took out a book, as we did not ask for ID on the sign-in sheets. Staff had book cards and shelf list cards to contend with and these took a lot of manual labour to sort and file. Many books were also lost with these ‘old’ methods. The Dynix computer system is fast and accurate—a real joy to use.”

Allen (1992) states that “Automation in the workplace has created ‘jobless growth’ and its rapid extension will, it is argued, progressively undermine the quality and status of the remaining working-class jobs” (p. 180). This does not seem to have been the case in the Vancouver Island Regional Library. In 1991, the Regional Library employed 146 full time equivalent staff and circulated 3,326,430 items. In 2001, the Regional Library employed 179 full time equivalents and circulated 4,166,779 items. Staff increased by 23% and circulation increased by 25%. Some tasks disappeared and others were added but overall the growth was not “jobless.”

On a similar note, Frohmann (1996), a library theorist, comments,

Computerization does little to lead to worker self-management and professional autonomy, because the tendency of software is toward management artificially installed. Further loss of autonomy and a decline in the capacity for independent professional judgment results from the concentration of knowledge at the top of institutional hierarchies.

In contrast, Isabel seemed hopeful that automation would improve the quality of the jobs in the Library. She wrote on the questionnaire,

“Self-service procedures should be introduced for customers including circulation, payment of fees and fines, notification of overdues and holds, etc. This should free up staff to provide value-added services such as the children’s events, instruction and computer training.”

It is, of course, impossible to know which prediction will come to pass. To me, this is the postmodern condition of work—always changing, always uncertain. Is this entirely negative? I think each person must decide for themselves.

CUPE has a motto related to library work—“Library workers make libraries work.” I think this motto applies not only to CUPE but also to BCGEU workers, management workers, and page workers. We are all employees of the Vancouver Island Regional Library. In chapter seven I will briefly touch on library work in the context of the Library as a bureaucracy.

6.10. Bureaucracy and the Goal of the Regional Library

The staff of the Regional Library seem to understand bureaucracy in different ways. For example, the librarian focus group seemed to think that bureaucracy was necessary although unpopular. Beth said,

“The way I explain it [bureaucracy] to people is that it may seem like we’re imposing a lot of what might appear to be unnecessary rules, or unnecessarily stringent rules, but the organization has an obligation not to spend its money stupidly. Spending it stupidly would be allowing a situation to develop that could potentially flare up into an ugly legal battle and possibly result in a huge legal settlement. That’s not what we should be spending our money on.... I think of it as a way of making some things easier and simpler because there is not so much ad hoc decision making. There is not as much second guessing and questioning of decisions. The staff can develop more trust that there is a process.”

Isabel also commented on why she thought bureaucracy was necessary for the Regional Library. She said,

“I think that’s what a lot of our front line staff have a hard time internalizing. They may work in a one person branch, for example in Tahsis or Sointula, so they

don't understand the ins and outs of serving a population of 428,000 people, over 400,000 square miles, with a staff of 357 people, and a budget of \$13 million. It's really hard for them to internalize that and understand that it means you have to have processes and procedures in place to make sure that consistent service is being delivered to all our communities.”

Beth agreed,

“I don't think the staff see that part of it. They're not far away enough from the day to day business of getting the job done to be able to understand that.... I think it's hard for them to see that there's not some hatchet job going on. Sometimes I think that there is a feeling that we are taking away their ability to make decisions about things. I think that happens in a lot of organizations. At a local level they don't have the same freedom to make decisions that they used to have because there's money involved and there's a bigger plan involved.”

I interpret these comments as indicating the modern perspective because both Beth and Isabel seem to believe there is a need for “a kind of top-down command system” where “business is carried out according to a set of impersonal rules and procedures that aim to exclude personal considerations and conflicts from interfering with institutional operations” (Seidman, 1998, p. 80). As professional librarians, they seem satisfied with their managerial roles within the Regional Library's bureaucratic structure. However, while they seemed to think that bureaucracy is necessary, they were also aware that other staff are suspicious of bureaucracy and want to make more local decisions.

Katie, also a librarian, commented,

“Well that was a fear of mine as we moved toward standardization. As an area librarian, I had a fear that autonomy was going to be taken away. Because there is a huge amount of autonomy in the area librarian jobs. You can basically focus your job however you want. There are very few constraints beyond showing up. I'm speaking quite frankly here. Area librarians do their jobs very differently. I had a concern that in an effort to provide more consistent service we would lose some of that autonomy. It's one of those things that's very difficult because some people need standards more in their face than others and it's sometimes kind of hard on the people who don't. That hasn't happened yet and I didn't perceive it as a problem but I perceived it as a possible future problem.”

Katie's comments seem to indicate that she saw herself, less as a manager and more as an independent, autonomous professional. While Katie's position may be somewhat postmodern, in that she seemed suspicious of bureaucracy, I think it is also quite

modern in that it seems to be based quite firmly in a modern belief in the importance of professionals.

Frohmann (1996) agrees with Katie's ideas about professional work. He states, "The model of professional work is self-management, or autonomy from managerial authority imposed by others." He apparently bases this idea on the theory put forward by Aronowitz and DiFazio (1996) that professional knowledge workers, including university faculty and librarians, have been proletarianized and are dominated by management as much as manual workers. He states,

Due to the cultural dominance currently enjoyed by market principles in America, managerialism extends far beyond for-profit organizations, operating as an ideological principle to dominate labor even in publicly-supported institutions. In higher education, for example, the university professariat is increasingly forced to proletarianize its work according to the Taylorist shop-floor principles of outcomes assessments and quantitative data that measure whether specific, short-term targets have been reached.

Some of the branch heads also seemed suspicious about bureaucracy in the Regional Library. For example, Quentin linked bureaucracy to board politics saying,

"Over the years VIRL has become increasingly politicized.... As the system has become more politicized it has become more bureaucratic. This seems to stem from a management unwillingness to delegate authority along with responsibility to care for certain tasks. Clear understanding of roles from the Board level to upper management and other levels is needed."

Although Quentin seemed to be saying the Library is too bureaucratic, I interpret his comments as being more a criticism of how bureaucracy was being implemented than a criticism of bureaucracy itself. His comment about the need for "clear roles" suggests that he would accept bureaucracy's "specific roles with clearly marked duties and authority" (Seidman, 1998, p. 80) providing it is done correctly. If so, this is a modern perspective.

Responding to a question on the questionnaire about how things had changed in the past ten years, Olivia, a branch head, wrote,

“I did feel I was more in touch with management and HQ at that time.”

In response to another question that asked what changes staff would like to see made, Juliet, a branch head, wrote,

“To feel that we are part of a whole rather than separate entities. To have the staff at HQ work with the customers one to one (for a bit of time each year) rather than through Branch Staff. To have more communication with the other staff rather than feeling that it is Branch against Branch; or who is busier.”

Eleanor wrote,

“Streamline the bureaucracy. Somehow reach out to the staff in the branches, so they know what ‘those’ people at Headquarters do. Stop the ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ mentality.”

I interpreted these comments as reflecting a sense of alienation and dissatisfaction with how these staff members perceived the organization to be working. There seems to be a feeling that there is a breakdown in communication between the branch heads and the management, the branch heads and Central Services (HQ) staff, and between individual branch heads.

Other staff seemed to think the organization was functioning well. For example, in response to the question about what they valued most about the Regional Library, Heidi, a librarian, wrote,

“I value most the trust between branch staff and the public that has been created by official, and unofficial, policy. This allows staff to treat customers as people with varying needs and doesn’t impose rigid rules on every interaction. Most staff will go the extra distance for people.”

Lorraine, also a librarian, wrote,

“Consultative process of management appreciated and important for communications and morale.”

Ken wrote,

“The quality and quantity of services offered to all branches along with the friendliness and teamwork of all of the employees.”

It seemed that some staff were satisfied with the relationships within the Regional Library. Rather than seeing staff relationships and decision-making in terms of a bureaucracy, they saw it more as friendly and collegial.

As the Executive Director, I found the mix of comments worrying. Some of the librarians seemed to think that bureaucracy was necessary. Others wanted to exercise professional autonomy. Some of the branch heads saw the bureaucracy as alienating while others seemed unaware of it. As the Executive Director of the Regional Library, I am the head of this bureaucracy and am expected by the Library Board to ensure it is functioning efficiently and effectively. Good staff morale seems to be my responsibility. However, given the number of branches and distance between them I cannot have a weekly cup of coffee with library workers throughout the system as the CUPE president recently suggested I should. I rely on the bureaucratic structure to hold the organization together. I try to ensure that the people who work directly with me feel empowered and I expect them to do the same for the people who work for them, and so on, and so on. Somewhere along the way it seemed that this was breaking down.

On the other hand, as a researcher, I was happy with the openness with which the staff seemed to have participated in my research. Turning my attention back to my research question, I interpreted both the negative and positive comments as being from a postmodern perspective since they all seemed suspicious of “specific roles with clearly marked duties and authority” (Seidman, 1998, p. 80) and seemed to want relationships that were more collegial. I began to wonder whether the idea of a neutral bureaucracy as described by Seidman 1998, (p. 78) could be thought of as one more modern metanarrative which, from the postmodern perspective, we should be sceptical about. Postmodern insights such as Foucault’s way of looking at the power relationships that

permeate all organizations may be more helpful to our understanding of the tensions that exist in the Regional Library's bureaucratic structure.

Black and Muddiman (1997) argue that the public library will only survive in postmodern society if it abandons bureaucratic behaviours and turns to "new institutional forms of delivery." They suggest that "such forms will probably consist of flexible and shifting networks and partnerships, utilizing... different kinds of information 'systems' and a rich and varied technological and skills mix" (p. 149). Some of these things are already happening. The Vancouver Island Regional Library is establishing networks and partnerships with other libraries to purchase online databases and share ideas on how to do things better. We are joining with other public sector organizations to share expertise on such things as public sector purchasing. We consider our legal, financial, management and labour relations consultants as partners and rely on them. We are changing our skills mix to include more technically skilled workers.

Muddiman (1999) also states,

After modernity, there is no longer any place for a reified, legitimised body of knowledge that dominates public discourse and excludes all unable or unwilling to learn its tongue. Postmodern information science might devise... increasingly flexible technologies to empower users, and provide access to a limitless range of virtual resources.

The Regional Library, like most public libraries in British Columbia, is also doing many of these things. A major change has been the introduction of our Website through which people place holds on books, renew books, ask reference questions, take online courses, and so on, from home at any time of the day or night. Our business seems to be growing with an increase in circulation of more than 10% in 2002.

However, despite developing "networks and partnerships," introducing "flexible technologies" and flattening the organizational structure, internally, the Regional

Library is still a bureaucracy. Black and Muddiman (1997) seem to shed some light on this when they write,

Moves towards automation of systems and services reduce hierarchy, but increase the power and pervasiveness of set rules and functions, leading to the development of... “machine” bureaucracies. The “professionalization” of the workforce in the sixties was in theory supposed to tame bureaucracy and create institutions led by ideals of education and public service and characterized by the exercise of variation and professional discretion. But as we have seen, the institutional preoccupation of librarians dies hard, for the demands of the library as machine, or system, are ever present and in some ways expanding. (p. 87)

I think that the notion of a “machine” is a useful metaphor for describing a modern bureaucracy. It seems to capture the idea that the whole organization is made up of parts (board members, salaried staff, unionized staff, and pages) that must work together. There is no autonomy anywhere in the organization because every part depends on the functioning of every other part. There is no machine operator separate from the machine. The machine simply grinds along lending books and CDs, gathering them back in, collecting fines, and paying bills.

Black and Muddiman (1997) also suggest that “The post modern perception of the public institution lies... at the real root of this dilemma.” They say that “the old narrative of the ‘public interest’ is one that it is increasingly difficult to sustain as what is ‘public’ diversifies and fragments” (p. 149). It seems that, having lost public confidence in the metanarratives that gave public libraries their purpose, the machine simply grinds along unsure of where it is going. But, I think we need to remember, that the idea of the “public interest” was itself a metanarrative. It was an idea that had been constructed. It was not the truth.

I think that it is useful to look at the Vancouver Island Regional Library in terms of modern and postmodern views about bureaucracy. It is particularly worthwhile remembering that a postmodern deconstruction of the social condition does not

necessarily produce answers or major change. It may simply provide us with opportunities to look at things differently. In chapter seven I try to gain a different perspective about library bureaucracy by talking about it in terms of competing discourses.

6.11. Conclusion

In chapter six, I interpreted hermeneutically, comments from questionnaires, interviews and focus groups made by stakeholders in the Vancouver Island Regional Library that seem to be related to the postmodern social condition. In chapter seven, I synthesize this interpretation with my interpretation in chapter five and suggest we question some of the modern tenets of public librarianship and consider some pragmatic strategies that may be of value.

After Chapter Six

I never said any of this was the truth. It is only a few ideas.

Before Chapter Seven

This chapter was the most interesting to write.

I wrote the first version based on an outline that seemed to flow from the previous chapters. I did not like it but could not figure out how to change it.

Then life happened.

I went to a conference. One evening I was working on my exit seminar. My computer wouldn't display files in the normal way and I was growing more and more frustrated. When I finally was able to make it work, an insight suddenly hit me. The exit seminar was itself a whole new hermeneutic cycle.

Not only that, but the literature review about the role and purpose of public libraries, which I had deleted from chapter two, was suddenly relevant.

I found the file and added it with the tap of a key.

CHAPTER 7. RECONSIDERING THE MODERN TENETS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIANSHIP

7.1. Introduction

I recognize that it is customary to conclude a modern PhD thesis with a summary that synthesizes the researcher's "original scholarly or creative work" (James Cook University, 2000). That is what this chapter is about.

I started my second hermeneutic cycle by rereading chapters five and six to gain a sense of the text as a whole. I then did a structural analysis and developed a series of themes. They were

1. The Library as a workplace
2. Library services
3. Library cataloguing and display
4. Library collection
5. Planning for the future.

I tried to hermeneutically interpret my naïve reading of the chapters, the themes I had coded in *QSR NVivo*, my own pre-understandings, and ideas from the literature. The result was not what I hoped for. Despite the interesting ideas, the whole thing seemed flat, dreary and modern. I think I had probably not reached what Kvale (1996) calls a "good Gestalt." (p. 48). At this point, two things happened. My PhD exit seminar was scheduled and I attended the annual conference of the British Columbia Library Association.

For my exit seminar I was required to prepare a forty minute Power Point presentation about my thesis. I estimated I had to say everything I wanted to say in a maximum of about 6000 spoken words. I knew it would be difficult to include all the ideas found in this approximately 100,000 word thesis in such a short presentation. I

decided to present only the highlights from my second hermeneutic cycle. I did this by identifying 12 tenets of public librarianship that, in light of postmodern thought and actual practice, seemed questionable.

At the B.C. Library Association conference, I found that the sessions all seemed to focus on promoting the very modern, positivist tenets of librarianship that I thought should be questioned. While most of the people attending the sessions seemed to appreciate this approach, I felt like Trosow (2001) “at the periphery.” I wondered why the tenets seemed to be so attractive to so many people. I began to think that they might appeal to librarians’ modern belief in the scientific nature of library science. I thought they might also appeal to librarians’ modern interest in order and control. I thought that perhaps they also appealed to our modern desire for public libraries to serve a worthwhile role and purpose. I recalled Ritzer’s (1997) comment that “fellowships of discourse... prevent those outside those realms from speaking, at least with any authority” I began to think that the modern, positivist tenets of public librarianship could be seen as modern public librarians’ “fellowship[s] of discourse” (p. 46). It is these tenets that differentiate librarians from non-librarians and bind us together as authorities in the world of libraries. No wonder they are so appealing. I decided to reorganize the final chapter into a series of modern, positivist tenets of public librarianship that I think should be reconsidered. In other words, I decided to problematize these tenets and thus draw attention to different ways of understanding the Vancouver Island Regional Library and perhaps other public libraries.

I began to wonder about the kind of reception my ideas would receive. How would people respond to my suggestion that librarians abandon the very beliefs that seem to give meaning and value to their work? I talked to a few of my fellow library directors

and found that they were not completely appalled. They did, however, suggest that librarians in the field might find my ideas difficult to accept.

Let me be clear about one thing. I do not claim that what I am suggesting is the truth, is the correct way of thinking about public libraries. I simply offer these ideas as a new way of looking at the Vancouver Island Regional Library and other public libraries. I do, however, think my suggestions are *truthful* in that they meet two of Kvale's (1996) classical criteria for truth—"coherence, and pragmatic utility." I think my suggestions meet the "coherence criterion" through their "consistency and internal logic." I think they meet the "pragmatic criterion" in that the pragmatic strategies I suggest have "practical consequences" (p. 238).

I decided to organize the tenets of public librarianship that I suggest be reconsidered into the three categories that seem to make these tenets so appealing. I do not think that this way of categorizing is completely logical since some of the tenets could have been included in more than one category. However, I think it is a way of expressing what I want to say in a way that is reasonably understandable. The tenets that seem to be related to librarians' belief in a scientific basis are

1. The importance of the neutral stance
2. Marginalization of gender issues
3. Evaluating answers to reference questions
4. The scientific nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification system.

The tenets that seem to be related to librarians' interest in order and control are

1. The difference between fiction and non-fiction
2. The effectiveness of library bureaucracy
3. The practice of penalizing people who fail to return materials "on time"
4. The effectiveness of library planning.

The tenets that seem to be related to librarians' desire for a worthwhile purpose or role are

1. The requirement for public libraries to support intellectual freedom
2. The importance of the balanced collection
3. The superiority of professional librarians compared to other library workers
4. The need for more tax support for public libraries.

In this chapter, I will describe why I think these tenets are problematic and suggest pragmatic strategies that may help us deal with them.

I think that questioning the modern tenets and suggesting pragmatic strategies can be seen as one small step toward constructing a postmodern discourse for public libraries. I offer these ideas to anyone interested. From personal experience, I know that the process of understanding and adopting a new discourse is difficult but exhilarating. I think it is particularly difficult in this case because it includes making a paradigm shift, in the Kuhnian sense of the word, from positivism to other ways of understanding reality. As I find myself slipping from positivism to constructivism and back again, I know there is much that I do not understand and that the whole endeavour is rather "slippery." Perhaps that is why it is exhilarating. It offers so many opportunities for something to suddenly become clear—for what Rosenau (1992) says postmodernists call "instantaneous lightning-flashes of paradoxical illumination" (p. 82). What I am trying to say is that when I talk about shifting discourses, I am not only referring to changing the ways we talk to each other, although I think that is part of it. I am referring to thinking about things differently. The changes in the way we think will be evidenced by the way we talk. A new way of talking will, in turn, allow us to think differently about the Regional Library and other public libraries. I hope that this chapter will offer

readers the opportunity to understand, through their own interpretation of this text, at least some of what I think and am trying to say.

7.2. Belief in Librarianship as a Science

As I mentioned in chapter two, mainstream library theorists seem to see librarianship as a modern scientific endeavour. Librarianship appears to have first been thought about that way by the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (Muddiman, 1999). Librarianship's scientific approach appears to have been based in Newtonian view of science. Although science seems to have changed over the years, the so-called science of librarianship seems to remain locked in the 300 year old Newtonian understanding of science. I think that a number of tenets of public librarianship that seem to relate to this outdated view of science could be reconsidered.

7.2.1. The Importance of the Neutral Stance

I will start with the neutral stance. The neutral stance seems to refer to the modern, positivist belief that scientific endeavours are only valid and reliable if they are carried out by an unbiased scientist. Since librarianship is a scientific endeavour, librarians must be unbiased or neutral.

From a postmodern perspective the neutral stance is not tenable. Postmodernism sees everyone as being rooted in their own experience. No-one, including scientists and librarians, can ascend to a "God's eye position." Contemporary scientists, working in the hard sciences, no longer try to maintain a neutral stance. A stakeholder, who is also a practising scientist, commented that geneticists are deeply concerned with ethical issues. There is too much potential for their science to cause harm for them to be neutral. Gold, Rotella, Andriani, Scharf, & Zaleski, (2002) note that well-known

scientist Gould (2002) criticizes Darwinian theorists who have “created a synthesis of genetics, ecology and paleontology to explain how natural selection could produce change and form new species” for being blinded “to the significance of new discoveries about how evolution really works.” In other words, Gould seems to have a bias toward new and different approaches to evolutionary theory while other scientists appear to be biased toward remaining with traditional Darwinian theories. According to Bower, (1998), science historians suggest that views of scientific objectivity vary over time and between different sciences. Troubled and insecure sciences demand objective rigor while secure sciences follow less formalized conventions. Throughout this thesis I have also mentioned practical reasons for being sceptical about neutral stance. For example Trosow (2001) suggests that through the neutral stance “librarianship has come to see itself as a passive and apolitical force expected to be completely neutral on social, economic, and political questions” (1986a). Katie, a Regional Library librarian, commented that some selecting librarians ignore the neutral stance, that they believe they are supposed to follow, and select instead materials that they think will be good for people. In other words, I suggest that the neutral stance has become problematic for the Vancouver Island Regional Library.

Are there pragmatic strategies that librarians who wish to reconsider the neutral stance might find helpful? I think two approaches may be possible. The first is to think about and adopt a postmodern view of the validity of all beliefs. While this concept may seem similar to the neutral stance, I think it is quite different. From the perspective of the neutral stance, ideas and issues must not be evaluated. In fact, they should not even be thought about, except in a distant, clinical way. From the perspective that all beliefs are valid (at least for someone, somewhere, sometime) it is possible to evaluate whether ideas are valid in a given context. In other words, it seems that we each can decide what

beliefs are valid for us while not evaluating what beliefs are valid for others. I think Harding's (1992) "strong objectivity" might be helpful. Harding comments, "It is reflexivity that is the issue here: self-criticism in the sense of criticism of the widely shared values and interests that constitute one's own institutionally shaped research assumptions⁴⁰." Harding seems to be suggesting that researchers need to think critically about the ways they think about things. I think that librarians could adopt both the discourse of the validity of all beliefs and the discourse of strong objectivity. If we did, we could celebrate the wonderful diversity of beliefs that libraries store and share, while at the same time thinking critically, not only about the ideas found in our Library, but also about the neutral stance itself and other tenets of modern public librarianship.

7.2.2. Marginalization of Gender Issues

Another tenet of librarianship that seems to be related to librarians' belief in the scientific nature of librarianship is librarians' marginalization of gender issues. Since we must be neutral in all things, we can and must be neutral in regards to our gender.

I think this tenet of public librarianship also needs to be reconsidered. Both modern and postmodern feminist thinkers suggest that the fact that the majority of staff members in most public libraries are female does impact on how libraries operate and are perceived. For example, in 1993, modern feminists Hannigan and Crew (1993) suggested that librarianship needed to "develop a positive and proactive feminine paradigm that is soundly grounded in feminist scholarship." They stated, "There is little indication in our professional literature of the rich and diverse feminist theories that exist outside of traditional library thinking" (p. 28). Although, since that time, some

⁴⁰ In this thesis I have tried to look at the modern, positivist assumptions which underlie much library research and practice as suggested by Harding (1992).

library theorists (Harris, 1993; Hildebrand, 2000; Kerslake, 1999; Olson 2001, Pritchard, 1994; G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford, 1997; Taylor, 1995) have written about librarianship from a feminist perspective, the number of articles and books seems quite limited. Kerslake suggests that the library profession seems instead to be “fixated on the—very masculinized—professional/scientificization debate” (p. 60)⁴¹.

I think that librarians would benefit from understanding postmodern feminist approaches to librarianship offered by both modern and postmodern feminists. However, not everyone agrees. For example, Blaise Cronin, Dean of Information Science at Indiana University, Bloomington, (2001) attacks Harris and Pritchard’s feminist library work, saying,

A decade or so ago, Roma Harris wrote a book entitled *Librarianship: The Erosion of a Woman’s Profession* (there’s nothing like nailing your flag firmly to the mast). In it she vaunts “the female traditions of library work” and the “female identity of the profession.” But she doesn’t stop there. Her rallying cry to the American Library Association (ALA) and kindred bodies is “to become feminist associations,” no less.

Cronin continues,

However, Harris doesn’t take the proverbial biscuit, despite her unabashed commitment to agency and activism. That honor goes to Sarah Pritchard... for an exhortation and a question... “If we believe in ourselves, our profession, and the people we serve, we have a moral responsibility to become Amazons with laptops,” runs the exhortation.

Cronin adds,

I feel no categorical imperative to become an Amazon waving my laptop in the air, and I sincerely hope that applies to the majority of *LJ*’s [*Library Journal*’s] readership. Next the question that helped Pritchard win the biscuit: “...how can the profession be sexist when it is female-dominated?” Right on!

⁴¹ Ilett (2002) seems to confirm my assessment when she comments that her literature review “demonstrates lack of sustained engagement between feminist theory and mainstream librarianship within Britain” (p. 39).

I interpret this as Cronin's failure to understand that women can be "sexist" if they have not been conscientized by feminist thought. Cronin also comments,

Unfortunately, some of the feminist rhetoric swirling around Libraryland is an open invitation to rampant relativism. I have been struck by the rising tide of uncritical, cookie-cutter articles invoking "isms" emanating from our library schools. Feminism (or "feminisms," as Olsen⁴² would have it) is, of course, right up there at the top of the list. It is closely followed by, and sometimes accompanying, constructivism.

I think Cronin's comments can be seen as an example of Shotter's "textual violence in academe" (1997, p. 17) mentioned earlier in this thesis. Instead of responding critically to Harris, Pritchard and Olson's scholarly work, Cronin uses a superficial, slang-laden approach to attack them personally. Colleagues in the field of Education assure me that such anti-feminist articles do not appear in their journals. Why does a serious periodical like *Library Journal*, described by the magazine database *Academic Search Elite* as, "A full-service magazine/working tool tailored to the information needs of librarians and managers in public, academic and corporate libraries" publish this sort of thing? Could it be that Cronin's mocking approach to feminism is included in this journal because it represents the dominant discourse of library and information science and is, for the majority of readers, "good for a laugh"? Facing the possibility of such a reaction, it is perhaps not surprising that few people publish articles dealing with, what seems to be, the very real issue of gender in libraries. What could the Vancouver Island Regional Library do? I suggest that we could acknowledge that gender is an issue in libraries and begin to talk about it. However, as long as librarians retain their uncritical belief in the neutral stance, I do not expect that such a discussion will be possible.

⁴² Cronin is referring to Hope Olson but spells her name incorrectly.

7.2.3. *Evaluating Answers to Reference Questions*

Another tenet that seems to be related to the belief that librarianship is a scientific endeavour is the modern, positivist belief that it is possible to measure the correctness and completeness of answers to reference questions. In chapter five, I suggested that it seems difficult to measure the *correctness* of answers to reference questions in light of the postmodern notion that truth is not out there waiting to be found. I also mentioned that it seems difficult to measure the *completeness* of answers to reference questions, in light of the postmodern notion that information is exploding into “infoglut.”

The literature of library and information science is full of modern talk about information literacy. For example, Eisenberg and Berkowitz (1996) state that children can become information literate through practicing their copyrighted “Big 6 Skills⁴³.”

Luke and Kapitzke (1999) criticize this approach saying that

“The Big Six” are obsolete because they embody assumptions of print culture and of a linear scientific method that are being superseded by other modes of inquiry, thinking and analysis currently being invented by, among others, students, researchers and scientists, teachers and librarians. (p. 484)

Luke and Kapitzke (1999) suggest that librarians in educational institutions should instead teach information literacy skills that would deal with

- the social construction and cultural authority of knowledge;
- the political economies of knowledge ownership and control;
- the development of local communities’ and cultures’ capacities to critique and construct knowledge. (pp. 483-4)

Based on their insights, I suggest that we could adopt different criteria for measuring the success of a Regional Library reference transaction.

⁴³ The Big 6 Skills are “to define the task or problem; select the resources that will solve the problem; locate the sources; engage with and use the materials; synthesize the information; and evaluate the product and problem solving process” (Luke & Kapitzke, 1999, p. 478)

The first new criterion could be based in the postmodern notion that knowledge, even knowledge recorded in reputable encyclopaedias, directories, databases, or other highly regarded library reference tools, is always local, personal, constructed, and biased. Someone, somewhere, somehow constructed each piece of knowledge. If librarians understood knowledge in this way, they could help customers become aware of the biased nature of all information sources. In other words, in a successful reference transaction, the customer would understand that the information the librarian had provided was not true in the modern sense. It was inescapably biased in nature.

The second new criterion for a successful reference transaction could be based on the notion that meaning resides in a reader's interpretation of a text. Luke and Kapitzke (1999) describe this process as it applies to students. I suggest that it also applies to Regional Library customers and take the liberty of inserting customer where they write "student":

texts and knowledge are not pre-existing, waiting to be discovered and documented through library work. Rather, they can be co-constructed by the [customer] in a mediated dialogue with other times and spaces, texts and identities—both real and virtual. In this way libraries can be sites where [customers] can use these same technologies to actively and critically construct, shape and negotiate knowledge, practices and identities. (p. 486)

In other words, in a successful reference transaction, the customer would take knowledge obtained from the Library, combine it with what they already knew, and make it their own—local, personal, constructed and biased.

The third new criterion for a successful reference transaction could be based on the postmodern notion of "infoglut." Because contemporary information sources are fluid, contradictory, and multiple, it is not practical to explore every possible source of information related to every reference question. As Eisenberg (2003) commented at the B.C. Library Association convention, it could take years to do a complete Google search

on many subjects. Since there can be no single standard for judging the completeness of an answer to a reference question, a pragmatic solution could be that individual customers decide for themselves when “enough is enough.” In a successful reference transaction the customer would be satisfied that the answer was sufficiently complete. In other words, the answer would be complete if it matched the level of “epistemic risk” (Shoemaker, 2002, p. 10) within which they were comfortable.

I think that adoption of these new criteria could be an interesting pragmatic strategy for the Vancouver Island Regional Library and other public libraries.

7.2.4. The Scientific Nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification System

I think librarians’ modern, positivist belief in the scientific nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC) is also related to our belief that librarianship is scientific.

Postmodern thought suggests that organizing knowledge by disciplines is a convenience (Miksa, 1998: p. 86). According to Olson (2001), even Dewey seemed to see his system as a practical “procrustean” convenience similar to a train. Olson also states that in developing his classification system, Dewey “adopted the same simplicity as the Roman legions who were organized in tens and hundreds.”

In contrast, the modern thinking DDC researchers seem to see the DDC as a highly scientific endeavour (Miksa, 1998: p. 81). I suggest that we can see the DDC as combining 19th century scientific taxonomy (which classifies such things as animals and plants into classes) with the scientific practice of quantifying phenomena, such as time (centuries), temperature (Celsius scale), distance (metres), and area (square metres), using a base ten system.

The DDC (2002) explains how it uses this base ten system:

At the broadest level, the DDC is divided into ten main classes, which together cover the entire world of knowledge. Each main class is further divided into ten

divisions, and each division into ten sections (not all the numbers for the divisions and sections have been used).

In this system, all human knowledge is organized within numbers ranging from 000 (Generalities) to 999 (History of extraterrestrial worlds).

According to the DDC website (2002), the DDC is continuously revised to keep pace with knowledge. New subjects are inserted into the DDC schedules by reassigning numbers, using unassigned numbers, or adding decimal points to differentiate between related but different subjects. However, numbers for additional classes, divisions, or sections of knowledge are never added. The classification system's base ten system has remained intact for more than one hundred years. This persistent adherence to the ten classes, one hundred divisions, and one thousand sections can be problematic when new areas of knowledge emerge. In chapter five, Beth commented how difficult it is to deal with materials about computers. All materials about "computers, Internet and systems" share four sections within the "000s."

Why does the DDC not add new classes, divisions or sections of knowledge? What would be wrong with having, for example, 12 classes, 127 divisions or 1278 sections of knowledge? The answer seems to lie in the belief that the system has been scientifically designed and that the 1000 sections reflect the correct, scientific way of organizing knowledge by disciplines. Perhaps the DDC as an example of a situation where the modern, positivist discourse that "quantifying an issue or situation gives a better understanding of it than simply describing it" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109) is getting in the way of solving what seems to be a practical problem. Of course, knowledge in the DDC is not really quantified; subjects are simply assigned numbers in a sequence.

While Beth mentioned the contemporary problem with integrating computers into the “000s,” I think there is potential for an even greater problem at the other end of the DDC. As mentioned above, the “999s” have been assigned to the history of extraterrestrial worlds. In some ways having a section for this type of history seems very forward thinking. However, given the size of the universe, it seems unlikely that one section will be sufficient to accommodate the history of all the extraterrestrial worlds that may one day be known to us. Although this criticism of the structure of the DDC may seem irrelevant and even frivolous, I think it demonstrates that the DDC is not the scientifically accurate way of organizing knowledge that some librarians may think it is.

The pragmatic strategy I suggest seems obvious. If library classification researchers were to reconsider their belief in the scientific basis of library classification, they might begin to see the DDC as a complex and sophisticated filing system rather than as a scientific discipline. Perhaps they would assign a whole new class, “the 1000s” to “computers, Internet and systems.” I think that, in the real world of the Vancouver Island Regional Library where “Dewey numbers” are mainly seen as shelf addresses, the change would be greeted with a sigh of relief.

7.3. Belief in Order and Control

The next group of tenets I suggest we need to reconsider seem to be related to librarians’ interest in order and control. Because library work is about organizing large quantities of materials into some kind of useful order, it is not surprising that librarians have a pragmatic interest in order. I am not quite so clear about why control seems to be of interest. Perhaps we see ourselves as custodians of public assets. It is up to us, not only to keep these assets in order, but also to make sure that as few items as possible go missing.

7.3.1. The Difference between Fiction and Non-fiction

One of the tenets of public librarianship that seems to be related to librarians' interest in order and control is the modern, positivist belief that the terms fiction and non-fiction have intrinsic meanings that make them a useful way of naming groups of library materials. As I mentioned in chapter five, I do not think these terms work effectively. I think the way the terms are used to complement the DDC is so confusing that we should reconsider grouping library materials this way. This tenet could probably also be grouped with the tenets related to librarian's belief in the scientific nature of librarianship.

From a postmodern perspective, fact and fiction are both seen as being biased communicative actions. There is no reason to distinguish between them based on their truth status. From the practical library perspective, it is very difficult to explain the difference between fiction and non-fiction to customers. As I mentioned in chapter five, when I was a children's librarian, I tried to explain the difference to children. I told them non-fiction materials had "Dewey numbers" and were "true." Fiction materials did not have "Dewey numbers" and were "not true." However, this did not explain why tarot, astrology, and vampires are included in the true non-fiction section while historical fiction that is at least partially true, is included in the not true fiction section. I began to see fiction as "telling imagined stories" and everything else (whether scientifically valid or not) as "not telling imagined stories," in other words, as "not-fiction" or non-fiction. I don't think most customers understand the binary this way and, if they do, I don't think it is helpful. Interestingly the Dewey Decimal Classification system does not distinguish by truth status. As mentioned earlier, it designates the 133s for "Parapsychology & occultism" and the 800s for "Literature."

A possible pragmatic strategy is to no longer divide library branches into fiction and non-fiction sections. Instead we could organize all materials within a single DDC sequence. I think this is consistent with viewing the DDC simply as a complex filing system. We could then develop signage, similar to that used by the big bookstores, to indicate where items on different subjects were located. Signs using such common language terms as Gardening, History, Computers, and Novels could be helpful to those customers like Margaret who otherwise tend to “go up and down the aisles” trying to find what they want⁴⁴.

7.3.2. The Effectiveness of Library Bureaucracy

Another library tenet that I think is related to librarians’ interest in order and control is the modern, positivist belief that library bureaucracy, properly practiced, will ensure a perfectly functioning library.

A postmodern view is that a belief the possibility of a smoothly operating bureaucracy is simply another modern metanarrative. I think that the idea that bureaucracy does not work the way that modernists think it does is helpful. I think all sorts of things go on in an organization as complicated as the Vancouver Island Regional Library that modern theories of bureaucracy simply ignore. In contrast, postmodern management writers, such as Deming (1990) and Senge (1990) seem attuned to these issues.

As I mentioned in chapter six, I suggest that a useful way of understanding library bureaucracy is thinking about relationships within the Regional Library in terms of competing fellowships of discourse. In that chapter, I suggested that we can understand the lack of harmony that sometimes exists between the board and staff in terms of the

⁴⁴ We may need a second DDC sequence for children’s materials.

difference between the board's discourse of *taxpayer* satisfaction, and the staff's discourse of *customer* satisfaction. We might promote harmony within the Regional Library by ensuring that the management staff's discourse bridges these two competing discursive positions. By bridge I mean more than interpret. I mean that management's discourse needs to somehow exist alongside the two other discourses and provide a buffer and a connection between them. This seems to be a difficult concept to express and perhaps is a good example of how language limits what we can think and say. I can almost see discourse as endless threads of ideas that exist in a sort of *noosphere*, or sphere of the mind, as constructed by Teilhard de Chardin (Cunningham, 1997)⁴⁵. Depending on what discourses we adopt we become part of different fellowships. Management staff's current "discourse of cost effectiveness" seems to be providing such a bridge. It appears to support both the board's discourse of taxpayer satisfaction and the staff's discourse of customer satisfaction. In other words, as long as the management staff ensure that the Library provides service cost effectively, it seems likely that both the taxpayers and the customers will be satisfied and the relationship between the board and staff will be reasonably harmonious.

I think it is possible for the board, staff or management to adopt an entirely different set of discourses than the one I have just described. For example, in British

⁴⁵ Teilhard's concept of noosphere suggests that evolution is moving forward according to God's plan, and that it has now reached a stage where it is possible for people around the globe to share a common understanding in the sphere of the mind. I think it is interesting to include this idea in this thesis since it picks up the theme of the relationship between religion and science that was introduced by stakeholders who believe in creation science. In fact, there is a curious inter-textual relationship between Teilhard and Stephen Jay Gould, who I also mention in this paper. According to Cunningham (1997), Gould accused Teilhard of being part of the Piltdown Man conspiracy. This different religious approach to evolution is also consistent with the postmodern notion that religious belief has value. Of course, I am not attaching any religious significance to my concept of shared discourses.

Columbia, municipal library boards are made up of people with an interest in libraries who are not elected officials. Since they are not elected, they do not have the authority to decide on the budget as the board of Vancouver Island Regional Library must. They simply recommend their library's proposed budget to the municipal council that appointed them. In a municipal library, the board, the management, and the staff may all share the same discourse of customer satisfaction. It is only the elected municipal councillors who are concerned about the municipality's finances who need to maintain a discourse of taxpayer satisfaction. Some of the staff working for the Regional Library seem to be frustrated that the board, management and staff of the Regional Library's are not all equally concerned about customer satisfaction. Perhaps this interpretation of the difference between the fellowships of discourse in a regional library district and the fellowships of discourse within a municipal library will help them understand the Regional Library's bureaucracy differently.

While this talk of discourse may seem unnecessarily "new agey" to some, I do not see it that way. I think the concept of fellowships of discourse offers a useful metaphor for understanding relationships. Talking about the Vancouver Island Regional Library's bureaucracy in terms of competing discourses, rather in terms of an orderly hierarchical structure (which will work if we put the "right processes" in place) seems to be a useful pragmatic strategy.

7.3.3. The Practice of Penalizing People who Fail to Return Materials "On Time"

Another public library tenet that seems to be related to librarians' interest in order and control is the modern, positivist belief that if people are charged fines when they return items after the due date, they will be more likely to return their materials on time. I think we should also reconsider this tenet.

Postmodern thought distrusts the direct flow of cause and effect. There are too many variables in the experience of borrowing library materials for us to assume that something will happen as a result of something else taking place. This postmodern concept seems to be born out in practice when it comes to library overdue fines. Some stakeholders said they thought that charging fines was the only way to ensure materials were returned to the Library on time. I interpret these comments as reflecting a modern view and as accepting the inevitability of G. P. Radford and M. L. Radford's "discourse of fear" (2001). Other stakeholders mentioned examples of how fines do not work as intended. Another indication that fines are not working as intended is a statistical report, generated by the integrated library system⁴⁶, which totals the fines that have been accumulated but not collected during the 12 years since the Regional Library first introduced automated circulation. Currently the report indicates that there are hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of fines outstanding. As Executive Director, I find this quite disturbing. So many people owe the Regional Library money. On the other hand, I think it is interesting to remember that during the more than fifty years prior to the installation of the integrated library system there was no backlog of uncollected fines. During that period, materials were circulated using a manual system. Some customers paid their fines when they returned their books. Others dropped their books off when staff were not looking and escaped fine-free. There were no unpaid fines because there was no panoptic device to record them.

I think that, based on a postmodern concept of the panoptic principle mentioned in chapter six, the Regional Library could use the same panoptic device that records

⁴⁶ An integrated library system is the computer software package that libraries use to do acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, interlibrary loans and so on. There are a number of different systems including Dynix, Sirsi, Innovative Interfaces, and so on. The Vancouver Island Regional Library currently uses Dynix.

overdue fines to allow people to return library materials without the threat of a fine. Since the integrated library system stores information on the status of every customer's loans, all that needs to be done is to set the loan parameters to block further loans to anyone who has overdue materials. Customers could use self-surveillance methods, either from their home computer or a computer in a branch library, to check their own records. If materials were overdue, they would realize that they could not borrow additional materials until they had either renewed or returned their overdue items. Of course, there are issues of lost fines revenue and the possibility that some customers might just not come back to the Library again. I think these issues could be dealt with through other pragmatic strategies that are outside the scope of this thesis.

I think making it possible for customers to self-monitor and self-correct their own behaviour would go a least a little way toward reducing libraries' "discourse of fear."

7.3.4. The Effectiveness of Library Planning

Another tenet of public librarianship that I think is related to librarians' interest in order and control is the modern, positivist idea that it is possible to control the future through careful planning. I think this tenet also needs to be reconsidered.

In chapter one, I suggested that, if libraries were to prepare effectively for the future, librarians and library theorists, needed to pay attention to the postmodern condition in which libraries exist, as well as to the postmodern ideas that interpret and celebrate this social condition. I know from talking to Vancouver Island Regional Library staff that, while many of them are excited by the short term future of the Library, many are worried about the Library's long term future. I think that the short term future seems exciting because emerging new technologies are enabling the Regional Library to offer services not even dreamed of a decade ago. In contrast, the long term future is worrying because of the fear that these same emerging technologies

may eliminate books, historically the main business of public libraries. If all information and entertainment becomes digitized and people can simply download what they want at home, will public libraries be needed?

This view is not surprising given the recent literature of LIS. For example, Stratigos and Strouse (2003) suggest that libraries should “go digital” because “users prefer to use online sources to find their information, while a visit to the physical library is well down the list.” To succeed, digital libraries should “Pare down collections to just popular titles” and “retain the space but free it up for other organizational uses and ensure the space is inviting.” Similarly, Quint (2002) comments, “librarians who live and work in the protection of walled libraries can feel the cold winds blow as ‘wall-less’ library services emerge.” Gorniak-Kocikowska (2001) likewise suggests,

It is too early to predict what really will happen. Right now, almost anything is possible although not everything is likely to happen: from a complete decline of a library as we know it, to a renaissance of a traditional library as a place of refuge from the dehumanized world and immersion in what really matters to a thinking human being. No matter what happens, it will reflect the radical turn in the path of human kind that was caused by the computer revolution.

Here I need to ask a question: Is it reasonable for a person who claims to be a moderate postmodernist to even talk about planning for the future? Seidman (1998) suggests that planning for the future is a modern approach,

The Enlighteners created a social world view that has become dominant in the modern West. At its core is the notion that humans create society; we form a world of institutions which in turn shapes us; the interplay between individuals and the social system pattern the history and future of humanity. Finally, since humanity creates itself through its action, but within the constraints of human nature, history is said to exhibit a predictability that makes social engineering possible. (p. 21)

In contrast,

Postmodernism gives up the modernist idol of human emancipation in favor of deconstructing false closure, prying open present and future social possibilities, detecting fluidity and porousness in forms of life.... The hope of a great

transformation is replaced by the more modest aspiration of a relentless defence of immediate, local pleasures and struggles for justice. (p. 120)

In other words, while the modern, positivist discourse views the future as providing opportunities for predictable progress, postmodern discourses focus on understanding the present and investigating future possibilities. Postmodernists do not deny there is a future. They simply think it is uncertain and unpredictable. As Ritzer (1997) states,

His [Derrida's] point is that we are not going to find the future in the past, nor should we passively wait for our fate to unfold. Rather the future is to be found, is being made, in what we are doing. We are all currently in the process of writing the future, but we do not know, cannot know, what that future will be. (p. 124)

I think that much past and contemporary public library planning is a modern activity based in modern scientific values and the belief that the social sciences can predict the future. Dougherty (2002) states,

In the years following World War II a number of libraries produced and published impressive blueprints that often spanned five to ten or even as many as 20 years. These plans presented a variety of statistical data usually projecting current growth patterns over a period of years.

He then suggests that contemporary strategic planning may be more successful:

This different approach to planning recognized the importance of focusing on the relationships between an organization and its environment and stakeholders.... Strategic planning techniques also enable an organization to assess its internal Strengths and Weaknesses in relation to the external Opportunities and the Threats it faces. Called a SWOT analysis, its goal is to develop plans and strategies that take advantage of an organization's strengths while at the same time minimizing or overcoming its weaknesses and threats.... By including these new dimensions in planning techniques, planners are better able to create a vision of where the library wants to go and a map of how to get there. This information can then be used to develop detailed plans that flesh out objectives and tasks.

This is the type of strategic planning that the Vancouver Island Regional Library undertook in 1989. As assistant director at that time, I ensured that we carefully followed procedures similar to those that Dougherty suggests. We held focus groups; we designed, distributed and analyzed market surveys; we did SWOT analyses; we revised our mission statement, goals and objectives to reflect our new purpose; we

amended policy and procedures; and we changed the way we allotted resources to meet our new purpose. Unfortunately this strategic planning process did not produce the hoped for results. Most of the changes we made have since been reversed. Because we looked back and looked around rather than trying to look into the future, many significant changes that have come to pass (the introduction of access to the Internet and databases, development of the website, and piloting of inexpensive self check out) were not identified by our planning process.

Although I do not know and cannot know the future, as the Vancouver Island Regional Library's executive director, I cannot ignore it. As we go about writing the future, I think we need to be reflective about the many possible futures that may lie ahead. Shoemaker (2002) suggests that the world is becoming more uncertain and ambiguous and that organizations are now facing what he calls "epistemic risk—the risk of not knowing." He suggests that in a world dominated by uncertainty and ambiguity

the focus [of planning] has to be more on generating multiple views, surfacing deep assumptions and exploring the unknown terrain. Systems dynamic modeling has proved useful here since it helps portray our mental models. Also, the ability to generate and test multiple hypotheses quickly to enhance learning is key. And even more philosophical approaches, such as identifying the nature of our inquiry system or examining the structure of arguments, can help reduce the risk of not knowing. (p. 10)

Planning for the Regional Library's multiple futures by "identifying the nature of our inquiry system" and "examining the structure of arguments" is something I have tried to do in this thesis. I have gone so far as to question philosophically the very tenets upon which we base our inquiry systems and most of our arguments. I suggest that adopting a multiple futures planning approach may be a useful pragmatic strategy to help the Vancouver Island Regional Library adapt to the uncertain postmodern condition and prepare for our unknown future. This is something that the management staff are currently preparing to do.

7.4. Belief in a Worthwhile Purpose or Role

The next group of tenets I suggest we should question seem to be related to librarians' desire for a worthwhile role or purpose. In 2000, I undertook a comprehensive literature review of the role and purpose of public libraries. Through that review, I identified numerous different public library roles or purposes that research-based writers (Amey, 1997; ASLIB, 1995; Bertot, McClure & Fletcher, 1997; *Borrowed time? The future of public libraries in the UK*, 1993; Briggs, Guldberg & Sivaciyan, 1996; Bundy, 1998; Cox, 1993; Curry, 1997; Dempsey, 1998; Evans, 1998; Greenhalgh, Warpole & Landry, 1995; Holt & Elliott, 1998; Kent, 1996; Linley & Usherwood, 1998; Molz & Dain, 1999; Marcum, 1996; Myres, 1994; Nunberg, 1998; O'Brien, 1998; Rochester & Willard; Shilts, 1993; Terwilliger, 1999; Thorhauge, Larsen, Thun, Albrechtsen, & Segbert, 1997; Vaughan, 1997) and writers who had written opinion pieces either mentioned, promoted or celebrated.

In this literature I also identified writers (*Borrowed time? The future of public libraries in the UK*, 1993; Astbury, 1994; White, 1994; Molz & Dain, 1999; Greenhalgh, et al., 1995; McClure, Owen, Zweizig, Lynch, & Van House, 1987; Himmel & Wilson, 1998) who suggested that public libraries need to focus on a few well-chosen roles rather than trying to fill all the roles that librarians and the public seem to think they should fill. As I began to see the value of postmodern thought, I became suspicious of the idea of identifying a specific set of roles or purposes for a particular public library. The search for the correct purpose or role seemed deeply modern. It also seemed not to work in practice. Having tried unsuccessfully to limit the roles of the Vancouver Island Regional Library as part of the 1989 planning process, by ceasing to provide adult programming, I wondered if there was another way of understanding these notions.

Hanks (1992) provided some useful insights. He describes public libraries as having two types of “meanings”. The first type of meaning is related directly to public libraries’ “traditional ‘functional’ purpose of providing informational, educational, recreational and cultural materials and services to the public” (p. 49). The second and more interesting type of meaning is “to do with small town society” and goes beyond the direct functions of the library itself. He calls this type of meaning a “non-functional meaning” (p. 49). For example, the perception that a public library in a new community is a symbol that the community has a promising future is an example of a “non-functional meaning” (p. 55). Linley and Usherwood (1998) also distinguish between two different types of things public libraries are for, “established” roles including “education, literacy, information, leisure and culture.... important functions *per se*” (p. 18) and “caring roles” including “personal development”, “social cohesion”, “community empowerment and self-determination”, “local image and identity” and “health and well-being” (p. 30). Based on Hanks’ and Linley and Usherwood’s insights I developed a somewhat more complex conceptual framework to help understand the roles and purposes of public libraries differently.

My conceptual framework distinguished between two different types of things that public libraries are for. The first type of thing is related to the services which public library staff provide. I called these “functions.” An example of a function is providing children’s library services and programs. The second type of thing relates to how people perceive public libraries. I called these “perceptions.” A perception is the way people think public libraries affect individuals, communities or the larger society. An example of a perception is the preschoolers’ door to learning. Since I realized that public libraries can be perceived as having both beneficial and harmful effects, I included both positive and negative perceptions in my framework. For example, while the preschoolers’ door

to learning is a positive perception, a place where children may be harmed by what they see on the Internet is a negative perception. I also thought that many of the positive and negative perceptions can be seen to be loosely associated with a library function. For example, both the preschoolers' door to learning and a place where children can be harmed by what they see on the Internet can be seen to be associated with the public library's function of providing children's library services and programs. In the end I identified five basic functions, 51 positive perceptions and 26 negative perceptions. A simplified version of this conceptual framework is attached as Appendix C.

I think that looking at what public libraries are for in terms of functions and perceptions (how people construct their understanding of their public library) rather than roles and purposes (what public libraries must do) is helpful. In this chapter, I suggest that we reconsider modern thinking about the role and purpose of public libraries. I specifically suggest that we reconsider four public library tenets that seem to be related to librarians' desire for a worthwhile role.

7.4.1. The Requirement for Public Libraries to Support Intellectual Freedom

One of the most strongly guarded tenets of public librarianship that seems to be related to public librarians' modern desire for a worthwhile role is our modern, positivist belief that public libraries must support intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom is fundamental to our free society and it is public libraries role to support it at almost any cost. I think we need to reconsider this tenet.

When the Vancouver Island Regional Library first introduced public Internet access in its branches in 1996, it opened up access to what seemed to be an amazing variety of information resources. However, along with access to all the useful information came access to pornography. Many public libraries, including the Regional Library, determined that restricting access to pornographic websites would be in conflict

with the important tenet of supporting intellectual freedom. We developed policies and procedures to allow people to exercise intellectual freedom with as few limitations as possible. However, as mentioned earlier, some customers and staff continue to find the possibility of customers accessing soft pornography disturbing. I think there are several postmodern concepts that can evoke pragmatic strategies for dealing with this.

I used to think that libraries actually did support intellectual freedom in a pre-Internet world. For example, I agreed with library theorists such as Eisenberg (2003) that there is a difference between selection and censorship. The idea seemed to be that librarians select materials while exercising the neutral stance. Once an item has been neutrally selected it becomes part of the library's balanced collection. Removing it because someone finds the content to be offensive is censorship. I now think that material selected by Vancouver Island Regional Library librarians was not selected from the neutral stance. It was selected from their biased perspective of trying to meet whatever they thought were the needs of library customers. Since most of the customers are "middle of the road people," the collection that was chosen is relatively benign and non-controversial. It bears little resemblance to the wide cross-section of thought that we now find on the Internet. In other words, from a postmodern perspective, the idea that there is a difference between selection and censorship is not meaningful. Since we do not select from a neutral position and are always biased, in effect we always censor as we select.

I think that a pragmatic strategy that might help us deal with the uncritical acceptance of the tenet that public libraries need to support intellectual freedom at almost any cost might be to adopt a postmodern incredulity about all metanarratives, including the metanarrative of the importance of intellectual freedom. We could then look at our belief that we must provide access to Internet pornography, as part of our

responsibility to protect intellectual freedom, with strong objectivity. If we did that, perhaps we would decide to forbid people from looking at pornography in a Vancouver Island Regional Library branch. Modernists might tell us that by doing this we are opening the door to rampant censorship. We might not agree. We might even suggest that allowing people to look at pornography in the library is opening the door to rampant lack of respect for women, including female library staff. In fact, we could look at the debate between those who support intellectual freedom at all cost and those who want public libraries to be safe places in terms of competing discourses.

There are problems with disallowing pornography. Since filtering has been proven not to work as hoped and people have different views of what constitutes pornography, disallowing the viewing of pornography is difficult to put into practice. I think that the postmodern notion that the meaning of a text resides with the reader can shed some light on this issue. The Internet is not the only medium that has brought unpleasant information into public libraries. Most public libraries also have books and magazines that some customers find offensive. However, as long as these items remain closed and on the shelf, like an unopened Pandora's Box, the library remains a safe place. It is only when customers who do not want to interpret particular images stumble across them, exposed on an Internet computer, that these unpleasant texts become a problem. Providing privacy screens or other privacy arrangements seems to be a pragmatic solution when we look at pornography in this light.

On the other hand, if we were to adopt a postmodern view that all beliefs are valid, it would be possible to accept that some people believe it is acceptable to look at pornography in the library while others do not and leave the decision to the individual.

I think the thing we might want to remember is, if metanarratives are questioned, choices can be made. And, yes, the choices we make will be biased and contextual.

7.4.2. The Importance of the Balanced Collection

Another tenet of modern, positivist public librarianship that seems to be related to librarians' modern desire for a worthwhile role is our belief in the balanced collection. The idea seems to be that because public libraries are neutral, they provide information on all sides of controversial issues. This allows the public to be sufficiently informed to participate in democratic processes. In other words, the balanced collection makes public libraries fundamental to democracy.

In light of a postmodern understanding that we cannot be the knowing subject and escape our biases, I suggest that librarians should question the idea that public libraries can provide a balanced collection. In practical terms, a balanced collection is probably not possible to achieve. Some of the librarians I interviewed pointed this out. Some customers mentioned how difficult it would be to attain such an ideal. Not only are library artefacts that show every side of every issue not available, but also library budgets and library shelf-space are limited.

Harris and Hannah (1996) focus on the economic impossibility of providing a balanced collection. They state,

with the sundering of this relationship between ownership and access, professional librarians must now recognize that the simple allocation formula of spending every available dollar to purchase additional materials no longer guarantees a foolproof recipe for adding value for the library's clients. In the digital age strategic planning in libraries has become more complex; the professional librarian is now required to consider how each resource allocation decision will add the greatest value for the client by considering a range of alternatives that include staff training, upgrading hardware, purchasing full-text documents, or renewing a subscription. Electronic publishing further complicates matters by providing a baffling array of format choices. The library now has the option to subscribe to the printed journal, purchase a full-text database license, buy a CD-ROM, or buy access to the journal on a remote database.

They describe these choices as "opportunity costs." Since budgets are finite, libraries cannot own or even provide access to everything they think their customers might want.

In other words, it seems that libraries can choose to either provide a thin scattering of print and digital materials on a wide range of topics or they can focus resources on areas that are important to customers. For example, focusing a significant amount of resources on educational materials to support the school curriculum and adult basic education courses could position the Regional Library as a contributor to literacy and learning. On the other hand, putting extensive resources into a strong multi-cultural collection could be seen to have merit for our increasingly multi-cultural society.

Then again, providing large amounts of popular fiction might be seen as a good strategy by the Library's recreational users. Many of the stakeholders told me about the intense enjoyment they experienced when reading novels. For example, Marlene said,

“I love to read. I think I am addicted to reading. I read a lot—maybe too much. Sometimes I read when I should be doing other things or even when I want to be doing other things⁴⁷.”

Nancy talked about how a person involved in reading is separated from other people by

“some sort of invisible barrier there—that book barrier. I certainly have it. If I'm reading, don't bother me because I'm reading.”

It was not long ago that people thought that print on paper books would soon be replaced by electronic books or ebooks (Harris & Hannah, 1996; Odlyzko, 1997; Shaw, 1999). However this does not seem to be happening. According to Crawford (2002), “In themselves, dedicated [ebook] appliances may have no real future.” Instead some distributors sell ebooks that can be downloaded to PCs for a small fee while others use ebooks to promote print sales. Crawford states that a successful relative of ebooks that seems to be making an impact at least in the textbook field is Print on Demand (PoD) books which are actually printed and bound books that are produced in short runs as required. It is useful to remember that Crawford, cited in chapter two, seems to be an

⁴⁷ This is a paraphrase of what Marlene said.

anti-postmodernist and supporter of the status quo. His seemingly factual account of the status of ebooks may be biased by a hope that print on paper books will not disappear. I personally think that ebooks will not be a satisfactory format for readers like Marlene and Nancy who are “addicted” to sustained silent reading. I think that ebooks, no matter what appliance they are mounted on, will not be equivalent to the text-based novels that skilled recreational readers enjoy. Instead, ebooks will probably be a combination of other technologies and will feature not only text, but also music, video, games, and alternate endings. According to Kuchinskas (2003) this multimedia approach is already underway (p. 52). Readers who love to create intense, vivid meaning and stories in their mind through sustained silent reading will probably not want to use ebooks because the technology will distract them from the mental activity they seem to so enjoy.

Nonetheless, the Regional Library could decide to focus its finite resources on such items. Perhaps they will be a significant part of our future.

The pragmatic strategy which could emerge from questioning the tenet of the balanced collection is that Vancouver Island Regional Library stakeholders could recognize that they have a choice about what is included in the Library’s collection. It could then be up to the board, staff and customers to decide what will be offered, rather than selection librarians trying against all odds to provide a neutral, balanced collection.

7.4.3. The Superiority of Professional Librarians Compared to Other Library Workers

Another strongly held tenet of librarianship that seems to be related to librarians’ desire for a worthwhile purpose is the modern, positivist belief in the superiority of professional librarians. If we are doing such worthwhile work, we must be important. In light of both modern and postmodern views about professionals, I suggest that librarians should question their superiority as professionals.

From the modern perspective, librarianship does not meet the criteria of a profession. From a postmodern perspective that truth is uncertain and knowledge is local and contextual, the concept of the expert professional is not meaningful.

I think that the current “discourse of the superior professional” and by implication the “discourse of the inferior non-professional worker” causes unnecessary disharmony within the Regional Library. Branch heads such as Amy and Nancy seem to find living with this discourse quite difficult. I have also heard staff with other non-library qualifications, such as people with special knowledge of computers and networks, finance, human resources, and so on, express frustration that “the librarians” do not respect them. In other words, these workers have another discourse, the “discourse of the self-important professional librarians.”

I think it might be possible to encourage the Regional Library professional librarians to downplay their so-called professional status and focus more strongly on working together with all staff members who make up the Library team. A pragmatic strategy might be to discuss this discourse as part of planning for our multiple futures. Perhaps it could be raised in the context of another SWOT exercise. In the modern, positivist sense, it would, probably once again be seen as a strength. However, perhaps a postmodern view could be suggested that would allow librarians to see their sense of professional superiority as a weakness. If Vancouver Island Regional Library librarians could begin to understand the ways postmodern thought can offer new insights into the issues the Library faces, perhaps they would see their so-called professional expertise in terms of an opportunity to change and a possible threat to our survival if we do not. Perhaps this type of discussion could even help us to develop a “discourse of the superior library team.”

7.4.4. The Need for More Tax Support for Public Libraries

The last modern, positivist tenet I want to discuss that seems to be related to librarians' modern desire for a worthwhile purpose is the belief that public libraries need and deserve more tax support. I think this idea is based in the modern understanding of the public good.

From the modern perspective, the public library is seen to serve the public good and is thus worthy of tax support (Campbell, 1983; Mathews, 1997; Murison, 1971; Simon, 1995). Greenhalgh et al. (1995) argue that the belief that public libraries are a public good developed when "the collective opinion of individuals persuaded decision makers that public libraries made a positive contribution to the development of society as a whole." The result was "individual needs and desires were identified with broader social goals, and there was agreement within public opinion that the responsibility for providing libraries falls to all of us as a society." In this way public libraries became "a 'common or public good'" (1995, p. 153). Usherwood (1996) makes a similar argument, stating that public goods "are collectively used by a large number of people" while private goods "are individually exchanged on the marketplace" (p. 15). Usherwood further points out that "public benefit can also result from the consumption of such [public] goods.... The fact that, at some time, 60% of the population... use a public library helps our society to become more literate, better educated, more technologically developed, more productive and more politically stable. Such a society benefits all." Usherwood concludes his argument by stating that governments cannot sell a "good and stable society to individuals in the marketplace." Therefore, "The library has to be publicly provided as a public good" (p. 15). Mathews (1997) comments, "Another of our most valuable characteristics and political assets is the fact that for well over 100

years public libraries have received tax support. This has marked them indelibly as being a public good and an agency of local government.”

From a postmodern perspective, the public library is not seen as a public good. Instead it seems to be seen as one competitor, among many, for the public’s money. In chapter two, I mentioned library theorists’ views about the debate between those who think libraries are a public sector service provider that is worthy of tax support and those who think they are entrepreneurial providers of information. Apostle and Raymond (1997) referred to these perspectives as the “Library Service and the Information paradigms” (p. xi). A number of writers, including Black and Muddiman (1997), Marcum (1996), and Molz and Dain (1999) promote the postmodern perspective that public libraries must become more entrepreneurial. According to Marcum, “municipal or other local funding for public libraries is not likely to increase... in the current political and economic climate.... public libraries must make difficult choices or seek external funds to pay for new programs” (p. 195). Black and Muddiman (1997) talk about the same concepts in terms of postmodernism:

The postmodern perception of the public institution lies, we would argue, at the real root of this dilemma. In postmodern Britain, as elsewhere, the old narrative of the ‘public interest’ is one that it is increasingly difficult to sustain as what is ‘public’ diversifies and fragments. In particular, the notion that a single institution—the public library—can act pre-eminently as a guarantor of the public access to knowledge is one that is rooted in the classical era of the welfare state, state planning and universal provision. It now carries doubtful credibility, increasingly as the kinds of ‘knowledge’ that libraries have come to purvey sometimes bear scant relation to the needs of the communities they are supposed to serve. (p. 149)

I suggest that this change in perception can be described as a discursive shift from “the library as part of the welfare state” to “the library as entrepreneur.” Although this shift seems to have stopped before reaching its logical conclusion, we now talk about the funding of public libraries very differently than we did prior to the 1990s and what

Black and Muddiman refer to as “the emergence of the new right and demand for financial accountability” (p. 100). Pragmatic strategies for dealing with this include looking at new ways to raise money. If we can increase our income through fundraising, grantsmanship and other revenue generation strategies, we should set about doing so. We also probably need to think about and plan for a possible future scenario where public libraries receive little or no tax support.

7.5. Conclusion of the Chapter

In this chapter I have suggested 12 different tenets of public librarianship that we might want to reconsider in light of an understanding of postmodern thought. In their place I suggested a series of possible pragmatic strategies. I recognize that to modernists my suggestion that we question and reconsider the neutral stance, the marginalization of gender issues, the ways we evaluate answers to reference question, the scientific nature of the Dewey Decimal Classification system, the use of fiction and non-fiction, charging overdue fines, the way we think bureaucracy works, the way we plan, our support of intellectual freedom, the balanced collection, the superiority of professional librarians, and our need for more tax support may seem puzzling if not outrageous. However, I think we need to think about our tenets if public libraries are to adapt to and flourish in the postmodern condition.

I also recognize that to modernists, my talk about discourse and discursive shifts may seem jargonistic and faddish. However, I think this kind of talk is useful because the notion of a postmodern discourse for public libraries offers a different way of understanding how libraries work. While we cannot escape discourse, I think we could construct new discourses that might work better in the future. Perhaps if we could recognize the modern, positivist paradigm, upon which mainstream library and information science seems to have been constructed, as simply one way of

understanding reality rather than as the true way of knowing, we might be able change our discourses to be more in harmony with postmodern thought and with the postmodern social condition in which we find ourselves.

7.6. Conclusion of the Thesis

This thesis was intended to address the question, “Can a postmodern interpretation offer new insights into a rural integrated regional library at the beginning of the 21st century?”

I began to address this question in the prologue, where I explained how I had come to a modest understanding of postmodern thought. In chapter one, I introduced the question. By describing what I meant by the key terms, I clarified it and set it in context. I also mentioned that this thesis appears to have significance, in terms of the literature of library and information science, and relevance, in terms of many issues related to rural public libraries. In chapter two, I briefly reviewed library literature that discusses postmodern philosophical thought and library literature that discusses rural libraries. In chapter three, I focused on my research methodology. I began by describing my epistemological/ontological position, my ethical considerations, my unique biases and my resources. I then described the method I used to collect, code, and interpret the research data. In the fourth chapter I outlined my conceptual framework and described twenty modern/postmodern themes that I think could be used to understand the Vancouver Island Regional Library differently. In chapter five I interpreted hermeneutically stakeholders’ comments related to eleven modern/postmodern epistemological themes. In chapter six, I interpreted hermeneutically nine modern/postmodern themes related to the postmodern social condition. In chapter seven, I carried out a second hermeneutic cycle, interpreting hermeneutically my insights in chapters five and six. In this second cycle I realized that I was troubled by some of the basic tenets of public librarianship. I suggested that we should question

these tenets and I proposed pragmatic strategies that might replace our belief in and reliance on these tenets.

Did I answer the question? For me, the answer is yes. This thesis *is* the numerous new insights into the Vancouver Island Regional Library that emerged for me as I constructed my own biased postmodern interpretation of stakeholders' comments, the literature and my own pre-understanding.

On a day-to-day basis, my interpretation of postmodern thought is often on my mind and it affects how I understand many aspects of the Regional Library. I think I am more pragmatic, less interested in perfection for perfection's sake, more willing to trust others' judgement, less likely to believe grand pronouncements, and more willing to laugh and try again when things go wrong. I think my postmodern thought has influenced the people with whom I work. I think the leadership of the Regional Library has also become more pragmatic, less interested in perfection for perfection's sake, more willing to trust others' judgement, less likely to believe important pronouncements, and more willing to laugh and try again when things go wrong. Perhaps, the most interesting thing is that I like being a postmodern librarian. I don't think I ever really liked being a modern one.

After Chapter Seven

Oh no:

My ideas are too extreme.

I've wasted six years and gained twenty pounds all for nought (rather a nice quantitative analysis of the thesis writing process, if I say so myself).

Oh well:

It's a thesis—who will read it?

Before the Epilogue

So now the last sentences are all that remain.

I will finish the story begun in the prologue.

EPILOGUE

I undertook the James Cook/Malaspina Masters Program because I thought it would prepare me for future career opportunities. I had been in the program for about a month, when the then Director of the Vancouver Island Regional Library suddenly retired and I became the Acting Director and later Executive Director. My original purpose no longer applied. With the demands of my new job, I could reasonably have dropped the whole project. But it was so interesting that I decided to continue.

During the six years from when I started the Masters Program until I submitted my final thesis many things happened. I became a grandmother, my two children and their spouses all completed their own Masters Degrees, I suffered a life-threatening illness and gained a few pounds, my garden “went to rack and ruin,” my hard-drive crashed, I undertook a major reorganization of the staff of the Vancouver Island Regional Library, September 11 occurred, and Bush and Blair made war on Iraq. Through it all, I spent most evenings and weekends at my computer, learning to think in new ways.

Now that it is done, I think that thinking and writing this thesis has been one of the more significant experiences of my life. Abandoning positivism seems to have freed me from the pressure of always having to find the right answer, always trying to create the perfect library. Understanding the way we think and share our thoughts as endlessly overlapping layers and streams of discourse seems to have allowed me to understand people and relationships differently. I realize that not everyone sees postmodern thought in such a positive light and that many people find its relativism leads to nihilism and social anomie (Kvale, 1992, p. 8). However, for me, writing this thesis seems to have changed the way I understand not only the Regional Library but also my family, my work and indeed the broader reality, for the better.

I hope that my few ideas will be interesting to someone.

After It All

There is an elephant on the table and I really think we need to start talking about it.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Regarding the Vancouver Island Regional Library

People perceive public libraries in many different ways. Below are some positive and negative perceptions from the literature about libraries. What portion of the people in your community do you think see the Vancouver Island Regional Library in the following ways:

	None	Some	Most	Don't know
Difficult service to use				
Fundamental to democracy				
Guardian against censorship				
Provides helpful, knowledgeable staff				
Important community landmark				
Information safety net for those without computers				
Institution dominated by self-serving professionals				
Institution which tries to do everything and fails a most				
Marginal community institution				
Museum for useless books				
Neutral public space where everyone is welcome				
Nurturing institution				
People's university				
Place for children to make discoveries in safety				
Place to be independent but not alone				
Place to go when there's nowhere else to go				
Place where children may be exposed to pornography				
Place where children may be harmed by undesirable adults				
Place where computers have replaced staff				
Place which is boring for teenagers				
Place which provides poor quality technology				
Preschoolers' door to learning				
Purveyor of dangerous pornography				
Research centre				
Responsible and creative innovator				
Rule-bound unfriendly bureaucracy				
Safe haven				
Source of general life-enhancing information				
Storehouse of documentary evidence from the past				
Supporter of lifelong learning				
Supporter of literacy				
Supporter of urban renewal				
Unnecessary service				
Valuable leisure centre				
Way to reduce useless information				
Window on the world's knowledge				

2. What do you value most about V.I.R.L.?

3. If you could make one change in V.I.R.L., what would it be?

4. What is the most important contribution V.I.R.L. makes in your community?

5. Many people think public libraries have changed more in the past 10 years than in the 100 years that went before. What do you think was different about public libraries 10 years ago? If you worked in a V.I.R.L. branch ten years ago, please also specify what you think was different about V.I.R.L. at that time?

6. Public libraries keep changing. What do you think V.I.R.L. should be like in 10 years?

7. Do you have any questions or comments? If you have a question, please indicate whether you want me to reply to you personally or whether I should provide my answer to everyone who is participating.

8. Would you be interested in being part of a focus group to talk more about your ideas about V.I.R.L.? If so, please give your name.

Yes No Name _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDES

The following list of questions is organized by postmodern theme being studied, the stakeholder groups who discussed the questions, and the main questions asked. Sub-questions are not included. The questions are listed in roughly the way the modern/postmodern themes appear in the thesis. There is not an exact correlation since the way the thesis evolved through the interpretation of the stakeholders' comments. For example there is no question specifically related to Waged Work. Questions related to themes that did not become part of the thesis are not included. I start with metanarratives which became an overriding theme.

Metanarratives

a. Stakeholders: Second Branch Head Focus Group, Board Members

Some staff commented that the library should provide services which will hopefully lead “to a lifetime interest in reading and use of public libraries”.

1. Do you agree with this? Why?
2. Why do you think reading is important?
3. How does reading compare to watching television?
4. How does reading romance novels compare to watching Classic Theatre on Public Television?
5. Why do you think using libraries is important?
6. What uses of the public library are particularly valuable? What are not valuable?
7. What do you think about people who simply come into the library to hangout?
8. How do you think reading and using the library affect people's lives?

b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. What do you think is the main purpose of V.I.R.L.?

2. Some people say that public libraries should show the different sides of controversial issues. Why do you think this is important?
3. Do you think this helps people to be better citizens?
4. Would you say this means libraries support democracy?

1. Simulacra and Truth

1.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

Many people said in the questionnaires that they thought the library should promote itself more. This could mean more interaction with the media.

1. What do you think of when you think of interacting with media?
2. Do you think the media present an accurate representation of the truth? Why?
3. Do you think promoting the library through the media should be 100% truthful? What about the dark sides of the library?
4. Could promotion only of the positive sides of the library be seen as a simulation of the library? Why?
5. What do you think about the idea that our society is no longer authentic?
6. Could the books and media in the library be seen as simulacra? Why?
7. Some people think that contemporary public libraries are not real libraries—they are more like simulations of the real public libraries which existed prior to automation. Do you have any thoughts on that?

1.b. Stakeholders: Board members

(Questions #2-7 from the Librarian Focus Group plus the following.)

1. Have you ever thought that the media make stories which are clearly aimed at stirring people up rather than presenting the truth?

1.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Have you ever seen articles about VIRL in the news? Example.
2. When you read the newspaper or watch news on TV, do you expect it to be accurate? Why?
3. Have you ever had an experience where you knew about an event but the newspaper report had lots of errors? Example.
4. What do you think about the comment that the movie the *Lord of the Rings* is true to the book?
5. Do you think it is important for a non-fiction movie to be true to the book?
6. Is it possible to have an accurate, unbiased description of what happened? Why?

2. Character of Knowledge

2.a. Stakeholders: First Branch Head Focus Group, Board Members

Some people think knowledge is out there waiting to be discovered. Others think knowledge is created in our minds.

1. What do you think about those two ideas?
2. Do you think knowledge about how people behave (such as psychology or sociology) is gained in the same way as knowledge about the physical sciences (such as astronomy or biology)? Why?
3. Some people talk about knowledge and information as if they are the same thing. Others see them quite differently. What do you think could be the difference between knowledge and information?

2.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. How do you think writers gain the knowledge which they include in their book?
2. Do you trust the information you get in books in the library? Why?
3. Do you trust the information on the Internet? Why?

4. What do you think is the difference between knowledge, information and belief?
5. Several of the people I have talked to said they believe in creation science. Do you have any thoughts on this?

3. All Beliefs are Valid

3.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group and Board Members (start with #4)

1. What do you personally mean when you say VIRL tries to provide a balanced collection?
2. Obviously a binary partner for a balanced collection would be an unbalanced collection—what would that be like?
3. How well do you think VIRL succeeds at providing a balanced collection? Why?
4. What do you think most customers might think about the concept of a balanced collection?
5. Do you think the beliefs of creationists are as valid as the beliefs of evolutionists? Why?
6. Who do you think has the responsibility to decide which view is most valid? Why?
7. Do you think that a balanced library collection should include both creationist and evolutionist materials? Why?
8. How do you think the library should treat books on evolution?
9. How do you think the library should treat creationist books?

4. Death of the Subject

4.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

In the answers to the questionnaire, many staff commented that that the regional library “provides access to a very large and diverse collection of materials.”

1. How might the concepts of high or low culture affect what you do in selecting materials?

2. How much do you focus on whether or not the public will actually take the book out?
3. How much do you think about whether the library needs to broaden the collection—even if the book may not be that popular?
4. How do librarians really get to know the area of publishing you are responsible for?
5. How do they keep up with new stuff?
6. VIRL only has so much money for the collection, how do librarians decide between two enticing items?
7. How much would you think about the library users' preferences?
8. Which library users would you think about?
9. How much would you think about cost?
10. How much would you think about how much circulation it would generate?
11. We know that many items which are selected come from customer's suggestions for purchase. How do you think this affects the quality of the collection?
12. How would you feel about not allowing suggestions for purchase?
13. A few years ago, the public libraries in Hawaii stopped selecting their own materials and contracted out book selection to a private company. If we were to try that in VIRL how do you think staff would feel about it?

5. Language

5.a. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Have you ever had the experience of trying to say something and words failed you?
Example.

6. Binaries

6.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

1. What are the binary partners for check-in, user, professional, popular?

7. Death of the Author

7.a. Stakeholders: First Branch Heads Focus Group

Some staff commented in their reply to the questionnaire that they thought the library should provide opportunities to “hear a local author.”

1. Why do you think we should/should not have author readings?
2. Some people think authors have special insights into their own books. What do you think about this idea?
3. Have you ever felt that you got more out a book than the author intended? When?
4. Why do you think some writers appeal so strongly to some people?

7.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you think authors have special knowledge about the books they write? Why?
2. Do you think it is OK for a reader to get a totally different meaning from a book than the author intended? Why?
3. Would you like to attend author readings at your library? Why?

8. Organization of Knowledge

8.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

In the replies to the questionnaires, many staff commented that VIRL gives access to “a broad range of information”.

1. How do you think the Dewey Decimal System helps customers find information?
2. Do you think it designed for customers or for staff? Why?
3. Do you think most customers understand how Dewey works? Why?
4. What do you think are the differences between how customers used the card catalogue, the fiche and the new Webpac catalogue?
5. How important do you think library signage is? Why?
6. What do you think about signage in large book stores?

7. What do you think about the ways book stores arrange their books? Why?
8. How well do you think the Dewey Decimal System actually classifies knowledge?
Why?
9. What about how it classifies new knowledge?
10. What do you think are the underlying values that led to the creation of the Dewey
Decimal System?
11. Do you think the Dewey Decimal system is based on logic? Why?
12. Do you think The Dewey System is based on a scientific view of reality? Why?
13. What do you think about the Library of Congress Subject Headings?
14. What do you think of Yahoo-like type directories?
15. Some people describe the Internet as chaotic. Does that seem a little melodramatic or do
you agree? Why?
16. How do you think untrained users find information from the databases or the Internet?
17. How is that different from a trained Internet user or librarian?
18. Do you think librarians have a responsibility to help organize the Internet?
19. How much do you think customers rely on serendipity?

8.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. What do you know about the Dewey Decimal system?
2. Do you use it when you use the library? How?
3. How well do you think it works?
4. Do you use the online catalogue? How?
5. How do think the way Chapters organizes materials compares to how V.I.R.L. organizes
its materials?

9. More Information Less Meaning

9.a. Stakeholders: First Branch Head Focus Group

A staff member commented on the questionnaire that “VIRL branches are a place for good information and knowledge.”

1. Can you give examples of when you saw people gain information or knowledge from the library?
2. Some people think knowledge is out there waiting to be discovered. Others think knowledge is created in our minds. Which way of gaining knowledge seems most meaningful to you? Why?
3. Have you ever gained knowledge from the library? How?
4. Some people talk about knowledge and information as if they are the same thing. Others see them quite differently. What do you think might be the difference between knowledge and information?
5. Some people believe that libraries were previously focused on knowledge but now, because of the Internet, libraries focus on information. What do you think about this statement?
6. Do we need professionals to help people find accurate information? Why?
7. Most people seem to think that information is exploding. Do you think they’re right or is this being melodramatic?
8. Are we getting smarter or less smart—because there’s more to know? Why?
9. What role do you think libraries could have in dealing with this increase in information?

9.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

(Questions #8 and 9 from First Branch Head Focus Group plus the following.)

1. Do you think they’re right or is this being melodramatic?

2. What do you think the availability of more and more information means to the average person?

9.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you think information is exploding? Why?
2. Do you ever use the online databases? Explain.

10.1. Role of Professionals

10.1.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

At least one staff member commented on the questionnaire that the library needs “more professionals”.

1. Do you think we need more professional librarians? Why?
2. What do you think more professional librarians should to do?
3. One staff member said “the public in general is unaware of the different groups within the system”. Do you agree with this?
4. Do you think it matters that some of the public are unaware of the different groups within the system?
5. What do you think are the key differences between professional librarians and clericals?
6. Do you think libraries put too much emphasis on the difference between professional and non-professional staff? Why?
7. Do you think clerical staff could do more things than they currently do?

10.1.b. Stakeholders: Second Branch Head Focus Group

(Questions # 1 to 3 from the Librarian Focus Group plus the following.)

1. Each branch is different, how do each of you interact with your area or branch librarian?
What do they do for your branch that you don't do?

2. How do you think your area or branch librarian should interact with the community in general?
3. Do you think libraries put too much emphasis on the difference between professional and non-professional staff? Why?

10.1.c. Stakeholders: Board Members

VIRL employs about 30 professional librarians.

1. What is your experience with professional librarians?
2. What is your experience with clerks?
3. Do you think the difference is significant?
4. How do you think librarianship compares to other professions such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, social workers?

10.1.d. Stakeholders: Customers

1. What do you think makes a person a professional?
2. Do you consider librarians to be professionals? Why?
3. Did you know that people who work in V.I.R.L. have different levels of qualifications?

10.2. Librarian Image

10.2.a. Stakeholders: Second Branch Head Focus Group

One staff member commented that “Gone is the image of a stuffy librarian sitting behind the desk telling everyone to sssshhhh”.

1. Do you remember that image?
2. Do you think it ever represented real library workers? Why?
3. Where do you think it came from?
4. Do you think that image has really gone? Why?
5. How do stereotypical representations of people who work in libraries make you feel?

6. Do you think it's a problem for the library?
7. Some people think that stereotypical representations of people working in libraries weaken library workers' status. When you tell someone you work in the library, how do they react?
8. How much power do you feel you have as a branch head?

10.2.b. Stakeholders: Board members

(Same questions as for Second Branch Heads Focus Group, excluding # 7 and 8.)

11. Intertextuality

11.a. Stakeholders: Second Branch Head Focus Group

In the responses to the questionnaires, staff talked about “a world of books, videos, tapes and internet service.” Authors often quote from one another's works or build on themes in other author's books.

1. Do you think there is a relationship between books? Example.
2. What books lead to other media or other media lead to books?
3. People often want to read books similar to one they previously enjoyed. What do you think makes them want to do that?
4. How do you help them?
5. Do you think of the books and other materials in the library as items in alphabetical or numerical sequence on the shelf? Why?
6. Do you think of the books and other materials in the library as a network of ideas and stories? Why?
7. What can you tell me about customers' use of the catalogue?

11.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you think writers build on other writers' ideas? How?
2. Do you think it's possible to have a truly original idea? Why?

12.1. Power as Shared Discourse

12.1.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

1. How do you see power being divided in the library?
2. Who has the most power?
3. How is that power limited by other people in the library?
4. Who has the least power?
5. Who has power over the materials?
6. What power do the customers have?

12.1.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

Question #1 from Librarian Focus Group plus the following:

1. What power does the board have?
2. What power do individual board members have?
3. What power does the executive director have?
4. Where does she get that power?
5. What kind of power do the customers have?

12.2. Power and Product Innovation

12.2.a. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you feel that you have any control over what goes on in your library? Why?
2. Do you feel you have an opportunity to influence what materials are in your branch? If so how?
3. What other services, if any, do you think V.I.R.L. should provide?
4. Are there any things V.I.R.L. should change? Explain.

13. Disciplinary Society

13.a. Stakeholders: North Branch Head Focus Group

1. Why do you think the library collects fines?
2. How does charging a fine for late materials make you feel?
3. How do you think it makes the customers feel?
4. Why do you think the library has so many rules for customers?
5. Do they turn some people away from libraries? Explain.
6. Which rules seem to be really important?
7. What rules, if any, do you think the library could eliminate?
8. What other organizations charge minor penalties for infractions of seemingly trivial rules?

13.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

VIRL's official position is that we charge overdue fines to encourage people to return materials on time.

1. Do you think it works?
2. How do you think people feel about library fines?
3. What do you think would happen if VIRL stopped charging fines?
4. What other organizations charge minor penalties for infracting seemingly trivial rules?
5. How do you feel about these penalties?

13.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Why do you think V.I.R.L. charges fines?
2. How do you feel when you get a fine?
3. What do you think would happen if V.I.R.L. stopped charging fines?

14. Pornography and Moral Panics

14.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group, Board Members

Some people commented on the questionnaires that they value the fact that the library does not censor material. Nobody mentioned any concerns about pornography on the Internet.

1. What does the word pornography mean to you?
2. Do you think other people share your definition? Is this a problem?
3. What do you think about pornography on library Internet computers?
4. What personal experience have you had with pornography in the library?
5. How pervasive do you think pornography is in our society?
6. Forgetting official library policy, what would you like to see done about it?

14.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Have you ever had an experience with something in the library which you found offensive?
2. How did it make you feel?

15. Marginalized groups (rural)

15.a. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you think V.I.R.L. contributes to your community? Example.
2. Is V.I.R.L.'s contribution in a small community different than in a large community? Why?
3. What do you think about library service in your community? Why?

16. Postmodern Feminism

16.a. Stakeholders: First Branch Heads Focus Group

In V.I.R.L. and most North American public libraries the majority of library staff are women.

1. How do you think the fact that libraries are mainly staffed by women affects how people perceive libraries?
2. How do you think this would be different if libraries were almost entirely staffed by men?
3. How do you feel about working in a workplace with such a high percentage of female workers?

16.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

Replace question #3 from First Branch Head Focus Group with the following:

1. How do you feel about being on the board of a workplace with such a high percentage of female workers?
2. Do you think the women working in the library are very similar or are they quite different from each other?

16.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Have you ever noticed that most people who work in libraries tend to be female?
2. Why do you think that is?
3. Do you think libraries would be different if they were mainly run by men?

17.1. High and Low Culture

17.1.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group, Board Members

In responding to the questionnaire, several staff commented that VIRL provides “good books” and “a first rate book collection”.

1. What do you think staff might have meant by a “first rate book collection”?
2. What would a second rate collection include?
3. Some people talk about high culture and low high culture. What do you think they mean by those terms?

4. What might be examples of high culture?
5. Is high culture better? Why?
6. What might be examples of low culture?
7. Is a rave low culture? What do you think people who put on raves would think about this?
8. Do you think the difference is important?
9. How might the concept of high and low culture relate to the concept of a first rate collection?
10. Who do you think should decide whether libraries should appeal to everyone or just have the high culture type stuff?
11. What do you think might be the characteristics of the high culture library materials?
12. Can you see how this might affect what libraries provide for teens?

17.1.b. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you think V.I.R.L. should have more best sellers—such as Danielle Steele? Why?
2. Do you think V.I.R.L. should have more classics—such as Jane Austen? Why?
3. Which are most important in a library?
4. Do you think V.I.R.L. should have graphic novels - which are sort of like comic books? Why?
5. What about ebooks? Why?

17.2. Cultural pluralism

17.2.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

In the questionnaire, many staff commented on the wide variety of people who use the library.

1. Give some adjectives that would describe the various people who use the library?

2. How representative do you think library users are of the range of cultural groups on Vancouver Island? Why?
3. How does the library use its limited resources to balance what it provides for the dominant groups with what it provides for specific minority groups?
4. If you had to pick between items of interest to First Nations and items of interest to Vietnamese, what would you do? Why?
5. Should the library provide materials of interest to biker gangs? Why?

17.2.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

(Questions # 4 and 5 from the Librarian Focus Group plus the following.)

1. What do you think the library should do to meet the needs of the different groups?
2. Should we provide materials for the dominant groups or should we have something for everyone? Why?

18. Premodern

18.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

VIRL has a lot of material related to magic, mysteries, tarot cards, witchcraft and so on.

1. Why do we buy this material?
2. How does it fit with our purpose of providing accurate information?
3. Who does it appeal to?
4. Does it cause any harm? Example.
5. What experience have you had reading this type of material?
6. When we catalogue and classify it, where is it located? What do you think of that?

18.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

1. What kind of person might borrow that sort of thing?
2. Do you think they are popular? Why?

3. What do you think about libraries tradition of classifying this material as non-fiction?
4. Do you think of non-fiction as factual? Why?

18.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you ever read books about things like horoscopes, feng shui, fortune telling, aliens?
2. What do you think of those books?
3. Do you think they should be in V.I.R.L. branches? Why?

20.1. Bureaucracy and Flexible Methods

20.1.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

Several staff commented in their answer to the questionnaire that VIRL has become bureaucratic. One person suggested that the library has become more bureaucratic because it has become more political.

1. What do you think about this view?
2. What do you think are the benefits of being a bureaucratic?
3. What do you think are the downsides of being a bureaucratic?
4. How does being bureaucratic affect service?
5. How do you think ongoing bureaucratic behaviours could affect VIRL's future?
6. Do you think VIRL should try to become less bureaucratic? Why?
7. How do you think VIRL could become more flexible but retain consistent service to its customers everywhere? Why?

20.2. Politics of Difference

20.2.a. Stakeholders: Librarian Focus Group

In the questionnaire, one staff member commented that the library has become “more political” in the last ten years.

1. What do you think they might have meant by that?
2. Do you think the library is more political now? Why?

3. Do you think being political is harmful for the library? Why?
4. Do you think being political is beneficial for the library? Why?
5. Often local politicians appointed to library boards don't use the library or know anything about it. Do you think this matters? Why?
6. How do you feel about the board members?
7. How do you see the board representing the public?
8. What kind of relationship does the board appear to have with library users?

20.2.b. Stakeholders: Board Members

1. What's your view of your role as an elected VIRL board member?
2. Do you feel that you are able to make a difference?
3. Do you feel you have more, less or the same level of influence you have on your council or regional district
4. In the questionnaire, one staff member commented that the library has become "more political" in the last ten years. Do you think the library is more political now?
5. Is the board more involved in recent years? Example?
6. Often local politicians appointed to library boards don't use the library or know much about it. Do you think this matters?
7. What kind of relationship does the board have with library users?

20.2.c. Stakeholders: Customers

1. Do you know who your V.I.R.L. board member is?
2. Have you ever talked to him about the library?

APPENDIX C

Library Functions	Positive Perceptions of Public Libraries	Negative Perceptions of Public Libraries
# 1. Provides children's services	a) Place for children to make discoveries in safety	a) Place where children may be exposed to pornography
	b) Place which encourages children to enjoy reading	b) Place where children may be harmed by undesirable adults
	c) Safe place for children after school	c) Place which is boring for teenagers
	d) Preschoolers door to learning	
#2: Lends books and other print materials	a) Delightful book place	a) Museum for useless books
	b) Quasi-sacred place	b) "Just" a book lending leisure centre
	c) Life-enhancing institution	c) Rule-bound unfriendly bureaucracy
	d) Valuable leisure centre	d) Difficult service to use
	e) Supports literacy	e) Unnecessary service
	f) Promotes community	f) Institution which tries to do everything and fails
	g) "Green" institution	
#3: Provides a public building	a) Important community landmark	a) Unnecessary edifice
	b) Neutral public space	b) Downbeat place for people killing time
	c) Physical space	c) Dangerous place
	d) Community focal point	d) Cultural slum
	e) Symbol of the community	e) "Just" a woman's club project
	f) Place to be independent but not alone	f) "Just" someone's project
	g) Place to go when there's nowhere else to go	g) Marginal community institution
	h) Safe haven	
	i) Symbol of a community's promising future	
	j) Symbol of a community's prosperous past	
	k) Women's club project	
	l) One person's project	
	m) Good for business	
	n) Supports urban renewal	
	o) Community builder	
	p) Community asset	
q) Entrepreneur		
r) Quiet place smelling of furniture polish		
#4: Provides access to computers	a) Leader in providing Internet access	a) "Just" an information safety net for have-nots
	b) Information safety net for those without computers	b) Place where computers have replaced staff
	c) Community builder, providing technology	c) Place which provides poor quality technology
	d) Responsible and creative innovator	d) Place which supplies insufficient technology
	e) Window on the world's knowledge	e) Recipient of technology backlash
#5: Provides access various types of information	a) Doorway to all recorded knowledge	a) Access point to information not knowledge
	b) Research centre	b) Purveyor of dangerous pornography
	c) Public good because it makes people wise	c) An institution dominated by self-serving professionals
	d) Storehouse of documentary evidence	e) Staffed by ugly ducklings, fuddy-duddies & harridans
	e) Archive for electronic forms of information	d) "Just" a nurturing institution
	f) Connection to people living and dead	
	g) Supports lifelong learning	
	h) People's university	
	i) Source of general life-enhancing information	
	j) Safety net for those who lack information	
	k) Supports information literacy	
	l) Guardian against censorship	
	m) Fundamental to democracy	
	n) Social activist	
	n) Helpful, knowledgeable staff	
	o) Nurturing institution	
p) Way to reduce useless information		