Public Libraries as Cultural Hubs in Disadvantaged Communities: Developing and Fostering Cultural Competencies and Connections

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ABSTRACT

A cultural divide has been demonstrated in the United Kingdom, with disadvantaged individuals and communities known to be least likely to participate in cultural activities. Recognizing that low levels of cultural capital can present multiple barriers to cultural participation and that public libraries have an important cultural role in supporting and promoting learning and development, this article examines issues of cultural divide through the theoretical lens of cultural capital. Through analysis of examples of public library good practice in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States, this article addresses an understudied topic and advances our understanding of the sociocultural role of public libraries in stimulating cultural consumption, participation, and engagement in disadvantaged communities. The article also calls for further empirical research to support and operationalize cultural capital concepts in library practices.

Public libraries have a widely recognized role in supporting and promoting learning and development in the cultural context. As "cultural hubs," they can "connect communities and change lives" (Carnegie UK Trust 2014b) by offering trusted spaces for people to come together to access, share, create, appropriate, and appreciate cultural resources and materials. In addition, public libraries facilitate the integration of culture into everyday life within and across communities through the provision of inclusive opportunities for collaboration, creativity, development, interaction, and enrichment. Cultural participation provides a mechanism for advancement and self-improvement (McMenemy 2009), in addition to improving health and well-being (Kim and Kim 2009; Leadbetter and O'Connor 2013; Carnegie UK Trust 2014a, 2014b), social cohesion (Jeannotte 2003), and neighborhood regeneration (Bridge 2006). However, recent social research in the United Kingdom (Warwick Commission 2015; Scottish Government 2016) has demonstrated a cultural divide, with people from disad-

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vantaged (e.g., employment, education, health) communities reported to be least likely to participate in cultural activities.

Low levels of *cultural capital*, understood as the cultural competencies that facilitate cultural participation and symbolize cultural capacity and authority, can present multiple barriers to cultural participation (Bourdieu [1984] 2010). Individuals with low levels of cultural capital can lack not only the orientation toward and ability to participate in cultural activities but also the belief that they are worthy of engagement (Savolainen 1995). In such circumstances, public libraries have an important enabling role. Anne Goulding (2008) has argued, for example, that for public libraries, "facilitating cultural capital may be a means of addressing social exclusion, contributing to social capital and stimulating community engagement" and, in so doing, give "an added dimension" (237) to their cultural role within communities. To date, however, there has been limited application of theories of cultural capital in the public library context. This article seeks to better understand the sociocultural role of public libraries in addressing issues of cultural engagement, through a synthesis of public library cultural engagement practices across the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States, examined through the lens of cultural capital.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is a concept that originated within the broad theoretical oeuvre of noted sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), who sought to identify those "social effects" that he believed lay at the root of "the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes" (106). Bourdieu believed that the education system reproduces rather than alleviates inequality by privileging the cultural tastes and interests of the middle and upper classes (Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] 1990). Central to Bourdieu's argument is that the volume of social, economic, and cultural capital we possess determines our cultural tastes and dispositions. Therefore, for children from more affluent backgrounds, the privileged family habitus "functions as a sort of advance" by encouraging an interest in and orientation toward "legitimate" culture that the education system "presupposes and completes" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 59) by recognizing and rewarding within the curriculum. Bourdieu ([1984] 2010) argues that childhood domestic and scholastic acquisition of cultural capital, when combined with the right social "connections," then facilitates preferential access to university places, employment opportunities, and prestigious groups and organizations (338).

This domestic and scholastic acquisition of cultural capital plays complementary but differing roles in enabling each of the three "expressions" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 69) of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. *Embodied* cultural capital can be understood as the "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu 1986, 106–7) toward a desire for cultivation and self-improvement. *Embodied* cultural capital provides the relevant competence in the form of cultural skills such as knowledge, tastes, and disposition that facilitate

the appropriation of objectified cultural capital. *Objectified* cultural capital is commonly understood as a familiarity with and ability to appropriate, both economically and symbolically, objects of cultural significance such as books, paintings, and artifacts (Bourdieu 1986, 109). The final expression of cultural capital, *institutionalized* cultural capital, refers to the possession of academic qualifications that act as "a certificate of cultural competence" (Bourdieu 1986, 109–10), not limited to the field of academia but rather functioning more broadly as a "trademark" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 58) of cultivation and accomplishment.

Social Inequality and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu believed that "using material poverty as the sole measure of all suffering keeps us from seeing and understanding a whole side of the suffering characteristic of a social order" (Bourdieu 1999, 4). The concept of cultural capital, which for Bourdieu forms part of the fabric of social life, provides a mechanism of highlighting the additional social and cultural factors that can result in inequality, particularly in disadvantaged circumstances. Bourdieu argued that the multidimensional nature of inequality could be shown through a reciprocal relationship with taste, which serves "as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place'" that guides individuals and groups "towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 468–69). Essentially for Bourdieu, our tastes—whether we like James Joyce or E. L. James, Mozart or Madonna—are socially determined, with much subsequent cultural capital research seeking to demonstrate a clustering of tastes, for highbrow or lowbrow culture, along class lines. The social conditioning of cultural tastes, preferences, and practices is significant because if the books we read or the cultural activities we participate in can be used as a mechanism of social classification (Jeannotte 2003), then an individual's "ability to enjoy or engage with cultural activities has a direct bearing on their place within society" (Goulding 2008, 235).

Cultural capital is created via the interactions among individuals, communities, activities, places, and objects, and determinations of value attributed to these interactions are what define culture as constituting a form of capital. In this sense, Bourdieu's ([1984] 2010) use of the term "distinction" can be seen as conveying a dual meaning—representing the power to both define the differences between and determine the quality of different forms of culture. Kate Oakley and Dave O'Brien (2016) argue that cultural capital theory can be understood in terms of how "differences in consumption patterns are linked to notions of value or worth," with a failure to consume or participate in "legitimate culture" regarded as representing a "deficit" (5). The argument that people can have the wrong values and attitudes toward culture reinforces hierarchical levels of cultural value by legitimating what is perceived to be good and bad. Bourdieu argued that this represents a form of "symbolic violence," which leads "socially dominated" individuals, groups, and communities to "devalue their own tastes, preferences,

lifestyle capacities, or whole habitus" due to a socially conditioned need to revere "dominant cultural forms and ways of being" (Prieur and Savage 2011, 570).

Contemporary realities of social and cultural stratification are characterized by cultural behaviors as opposed to taste preferences (Bennett et al. 2010), with an increasingly omnivorous (Peterson 1992) attitude toward high- and lowbrow cultural forms evident among the middle and upper classes. A shift to an omnivorous disposition is consistent with the "permanent revolution in tastes" predicted by Bourdieu ([1984] 2010, 279). Rather than be considered as a departure from cultural capital theory, arguably, an omnivorous disposition can be understood as "a new way of expressing distinction" and a contemporary "form of cultural capital" (Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal 2008, 150) that reflects the current social and cultural values of society. Meir Yaish and Tally Katz-Gerro (2012) argued that a cultural divide can be understood in terms of cultural participation levels that serve as a contemporary "public manifestation of social boundaries" (169), with the line being drawn between those who participate and those who do not (Bennett et al. 2010). Evidence of this has been shown in recent social research in the United Kingdom that found the "wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse" are "the most culturally active" (Warwick Commission 2015, 33).

Bourdieu (1999) argued that a low level of cultural capital has a negative impact on both orientation toward and action of participation in cultural activities that effectively "chains one to a place" (127–28). The inability to engage in "cosmopolitan" cultural activities outside of familiar class and geographical confines stems from "schemes of perception and appreciation" that they are "not for the likes of us" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 473). Helen Manchester and Emma Pett (2015) found evidence of this in the contemporary cultural participation of young people, with those from affluent backgrounds displaying "cosmopolitan cultural identities" in contrast to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are "positioned and position themselves as 'out of place' . . . in relation to certain, valued cultural places and activities" (224). As a result, low levels of cultural capital present multiple barriers to cultural development, with individuals lacking not only the orientation toward and ability to participate in cultural activities but also the belief that they are worthy of engagement (Savolainen 1995).

Public Libraries and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, by highlighting both the power of culture and the inequality that comes along with this, dovetails with both the purpose and the practice of public libraries. For Bourdieu ([1984] 2010), culture is a game that favors those who are oriented toward competing, aware of the rules, and provided with the resources and skills necessary to compete. By their nature, public libraries exist to level the playing field in the cultural context, offering opportunities for all to access and appreciate culture regardless of personal circumstances. Importantly, public libraries, by serving as "sites for the production, dissemination, and appropriation of cultural capital" (Goulding 2008, 236), provide a third route, distinct from

the traditional scholastic and domestic routes, to appropriate each of Bourdieu's three expressions of cultural capital: objectified, institutionalized, and embodied.

At a fundamental level, public libraries, as a trusted community space where people can come together to access, share, and create cultural resources and materials, provide an optimal setting for the development of objectified cultural capital. *Objectified* cultural capital in the library context has been defined as "access to libraries and their resources," which contain objects of "cultural significance" (Ignatow et al. 2012). However, Anne Goulding (2008) argues that in addition to the "objectified cultural capital represented by their library collections," public libraries provide individuals with the means to access collections via "their organization and exploitation" (236). The "exploitation" of library resources via reader development activities provides a mechanism of enabling and empowering individuals to develop the cultural competencies required to fully engage with library collections. Cultural competencies are vital to appropriating objectified cultural capital, which does not represent a tangible quality within cultural objects but rather the capacity to intellectually and aesthetically understand those objects. By touching on Bourdieu's (1986) distinction between economic and symbolic appropriation of cultural objects, Goulding (2008) highlights the key developmental role of public libraries in facilitating the accessibility of, rather than just providing access to, objectified cultural capital.

Arguments in support of the developmental role of public libraries date back to the Enlightenment, which advocated the power of cultural activities as a means of advancement and self-improvement (McMenemy 2009). Contemporary public libraries continue this tradition by serving as "rich literate environments" (UNESCO 2005) that enable and encourage learning and development in the cultural context. Through the provision of practical resources such as books, computers, and quiet spaces for independent study, public libraries support the attainment of formal qualifications that constitute institutionalized cultural capital. In addition, public libraries play an important role in the provision of formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities, which are "complementary" to those offered by the education sector (Scottish Library and Information Council 2015). Bourdieu's (1986) concept of "academically sanctioned" (109) institutionalized cultural capital does not sufficiently account for the multiple diverse routes toward personal, social, civic, and employment development afforded by lifelong learning, which, for many people, provides a more accessible and relevant method of learning. However, the nature of lifelong learning reflects a commitment to sustained development in the cultural context, which resonates with a personal desire for cultivation that facilitates the development of embodied cultural capital.

Embodied cultural capital constitutes "slow efforts to improve the mind" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 495), achieved via participation in cultural activities, active engagement with cultural objects, and efforts to develop cultural knowledge. The idea of embodying culture recognizes that culture constitutes not just the "works and practices which represent and sustain" our

way of life but also a "process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development" (Williams 1983, 91). Public libraries enable the embodiment of culture by providing multiple diverse and inclusive entry points, which can generate cultural capital by acting as a catalyst for the development of knowledge, skill, taste, and experience in a broad range of cultural forms and activities. Of pivotal importance in the digital age, for example, has been the public library's role in fostering digital literacy by providing universal free access to digital resources and learning opportunities within communities. Not only is digital literacy a core competency in contemporary society, but also it facilitates the development of embodied cultural capital by enabling the consumption and production of culture by accessing event information online, engaging with interactive exhibits, downloading e-books, or creating images and sound.

The Cultural Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries have an important cultural role in communities, enabling "home-based," "going-out," and "identity-building" (UNESCO 2014, 84) cultural practices, from the consumption of cultural products to active participation in cultural activities and, ultimately, to sustained cultural engagement. For public libraries, facilitating cultural capital—understood as an everyday resource rather than a source of power (Pugh 2011)—aligns with the inclusive ethos of this publicly funded cultural role (Birdi, Wilson, and Cocker 2008), which endeavors to encourage both appreciation for and empathy toward diverse forms of culture (Jones 1998). Therefore, viewing the collections, resources, and services that public libraries provide through the theoretical lens of cultural capital can increase understanding and awareness and the effectiveness of their contribution to stimulating cultural consumption, participation, and engagement—the mechanisms by which public libraries facilitate the generation of embodied, institutionalized, and objectified cultural capital.

Cultural consumption, the private use of cultural objects that symbolize wider cultural tastes and preferences, and cultural participation, including both public involvement in cultural activities and attendance at cultural places or events, have traditionally been regarded as symbolizing cultural capital (Bennett et al. 2010). Public libraries aid cultural consumption and participation by providing individual and collective opportunities to discover, discuss, and demystify objectified cultural capital. In addition, public libraries facilitate the embodiment of cultural capital by going beyond offering opportunities to consume or participate in culture to enabling engagement in the cultural context that is both "purposive" and "meaningful" (Susen 2016, 459). Cultural engagement, the sustained cultural behaviors and practices that individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by, represents cultural practices that are "identity building," resonating with Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and its foundational role in the appropriation of objectified and institutionalized cultural capital. Public libraries can help individuals embody culture by providing "spontaneous, serendipitous and planned" (Spink and Cole 2006, 93) opportunities to engage with diverse cultural

forms and, in so doing, bringing culture into the everyday lives of individuals by removing some of the barriers to generating cultural capital.

For public libraries, developing approaches to making "complex culture more accessible within communities is an enduring challenge" (Usherwood 2007, 36). Reijo Savolainen (1995) has argued that issues of cognitive/cultural competence and the sociocultural context that determines development and perceived value serve as mutually reinforcing cognitive and affective barriers to the practice of everyday social and cultural participation. How we choose to spend our leisure time represents an adherence to the "order of things" that provides a framework governing preferences appropriate to our "way of life" (262). The newspapers we read, whether we frequent public libraries, and so on, constitute preferences and practices that are, in fact, not a choice but rather a socially and culturally determined "choice of the necessary" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 379), given that individuals must "always choose within the limits of their competence, which is built on social and cultural factors" (Savolainen 1995, 290). For public libraries, a focus on developing cultural competencies provides a mechanism for addressing both cognitive and affective barriers to library use by improving the intellectual accessibility of resources and helping culturally disengaged communities to perceive library services as "meaningful and worthy of engagement" (Savolainen 1995, 262).

Within library and information science literature, most notably in the work of Elfreda Chatman (1996, 1999, 2001), the importance of issues of perception and norms in both constraining and enabling behavior in disadvantaged and disengaged communities has been shown. How individuals perceive themselves, the world, and their place within it has a significant impact on determining "those things that are important to pay attention to and those things that are not" (Chatman 1996, 194). Chatman's theory of situational relevance when applied to issues of library use can help explain why public libraries can fail to register as a valid destination on the "cognitive map that interprets the world" (Chatman 1999, 213) of culturally disengaged groups. The perception that something such as cultural participation has "little or no value to their lived experience" (Chatman 1996, 202) is aided by the absence of *skholé* (Bourdieu 1998), that is, "the disposition to invest oneself in activities that may seem wasteful to those who have not been liberated from urgency and necessity" (Robinson 2009, 504). Skholé constitutes a worldview that both shapes and is shaped by social norms (Chatman 1999). Social norms orient beliefs, aspirations, and behavior in line with the worldview of a specific group or community and can provide a barrier to building cultural capital by limiting awareness of "the cultural, educational and social norms that are fundamental to the greater social world" (Chatman 2001, 3).

Public Library Cultural Engagement Practices

Every day in communities around the world, public libraries enable cultural consumption, participation, and engagement via the provision of cultural objects, interactions, activities, and

opportunities. Book groups, story hours, literary festivals, creative writing classes, and author talks are just some examples of the cultural activities regularly offered in public libraries that provide a mechanism for the development of cultural competencies. In addition, there are examples of public libraries developing innovative approaches to enrich existing experiences and to reach new audiences in the cultural context. By reimagining "the library as place and space" (Oliphant 2014, 358), contemporary public libraries remain a trusted place to engage in familiar cultural behaviors and practices while providing a vibrant community-based space within which new cultural experiences not traditionally associated with libraries can be provided. Examples of public library good practice distilled from initiatives explicitly promoting cultural engagement in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States place cultural capital in the library context by providing a starting point from which to identify how libraries stimulate cultural participation and enhance community engagement and why this can generate cultural capital.

Demonstrating the role of public libraries in enriching disadvantaged communities through culture is the award-winning "Cultural Hubs" program developed by St. Helens Library Service. Despite its proximity to Liverpool, a former European Capital of Culture, St. Helens is one of the most economically deprived and culturally disengaged areas in the United Kingdom. Improving the health and well-being of the community, particularly among young people and those with mental health issues, is a key priority. Recognizing that cultural participation can improve well-being, St. Helens Library Service developed Cultural Hubs, a library-facilitated diverse program of cultural performances, activities, and exhibitions designed to engage, involve, and connect local communities with local culture by animating library spaces. From poetry to plays, breakdance to book sculptures, and crime solving to comedy stand-up, the diverse Cultural Hubs program aimed not just to make the library and its resources more accessible but also to crucially stimulate interest in wider cultural participation. Innovative projects such as Cultural Hubs highlight that by challenging "people's perception of what a library is for" (UK Department for Culture, Media, and Sport 2015), perceptions about who libraries are for can also be challenged, generating benefits both for local communities and library services.

The impact of Cultural Hubs demonstrates the need for cultural offers in public libraries that specifically target disadvantaged groups. By expanding and enriching their cultural offerings to provide numerous, regular, and varied opportunities for everyday cultural appreciation and appropriation, St. Helens Library Service expanded and enriched individual and collective cultural capital among the most culturally disengaged within the local community—families, young people, and the mentally ill. This can be appreciated, for example, in increased local opportunities for cultural participation, with one program participant stating that "a play like this would be something we would usually have to go to Liverpool or Manchester to see so it's amazing to have a quality production like this in my local library" (UK

Department for Culture, Media, and Sport 2015). Furthermore, by offering accessible and sustained opportunities for cultural engagement, a meaningful impact on the well-being of vulnerable library users can be appreciated. One library user who participated in a number of Cultural Hubs programs stated, "I had a long-standing alcohol problem. I didn't see a point in living. My real, active recovery started the day I came to the library" (UK Department for Culture, Media, and Sport 2015). In addition, further community and cultural engagement benefits were generated by designing and delivering programs in collaboration and consultation with local artists and residents, which enabled a collective sense of investment in and ownership of the program.

A recent national review by the Carnegie UK Trust (2014a, 2014b) shows more broadly how UK public libraries can improve the well-being of communities by serving as "cultural centers" that "inspire and "enrich" through culture and the arts. Examples of good practice highlighted by the Carnegie UK Trust include collaborations with creative professionals such as writers in residence in Northern Ireland and musicians in residence in Manchester; clubs that facilitate the development of cultural production skills among young people, such as song writing in Yorkshire, stop-frame animation in County Clare, and Digital Toyboxes mobile makerspaces in Edinburgh; projects that challenge "the misconception that libraries are just for books" (Carnegie UK Trust 2014a, 5), by providing a community venue for performing plays in Glasgow, dance classes in Cheshire, and the screening of live performances in Suffolk. As highlighted by the Carnegie UK Trust (2014a, 2014b), public libraries across the United Kingdom are adopting diverse, vibrant, dynamic, and collaborative approaches in the cultural context to "[enrich] the lives of individuals and communities."

A further mechanism that is being utilized in the United Kingdom to facilitate cultural engagement is the development of strategic partnerships with creative agencies. Creative agencies can animate library spaces and services in diverse ways, tailoring approaches to specifically engage local communities. For example, library services in Blackpool and Lancashire both collaborated on distinct projects with La Petite Mort Dance Theatre Company. As part of Wordpool Blackpool Arts and Libraries Festival of Words, La Petite Mort dynamically used street stilt walking and vibrant costumes to "bring the written word to life" while sharing "sentiments and stories" (LPM Dance Theatre, n.d.b) outside the library. In Lancashire, Accrington Library provided a nonconventional theater space, alongside other venues in the community such as an old arts school and a university, within which to perform a collaborative dance piece, "Cabinet of Curiosity," created by La Petite Mort (LPM Dance Theatre, n.d.a) and local high school pupils. By working in collaboration with creative agencies, public libraries can stimulate wider cultural participation and provide a hub for cultural activity within communities.

In Lyon, France, a recognition of the provision of cultural events as a "priority not the icing on a cake" for public library services has resulted in the development of a cultural policy "designed as an extension of collection policy" that consists of a series of citywide "cultural ac-

tions" (Mackiewicz 2004, 2) centered around a topic of local interest. Cultural actions such as workshops, performances, exhibitions, public talks, and meetings traditionally provide a mechanism for public libraries to engage with communities via the promotion of collections and resources. By theming cultural actions around a topic of local resonance such as "a fabric of innovation" that addressed the industrial roots of the local area, Lyon public libraries could directly connect communities with both cultural content and context. In addition, the scale and variety of cultural actions available across the library network, which provided multiple routes to engagement, helped to maximize impact and "enhance the capacity of the library to give access to knowledge" (Mackiewicz 2004, 3).

In the United States, an increasing appreciation of the benefits of "placemaking," a collaborative process of maximizing both the impact and value of public spaces to strengthen "the connection between people and the places they share" (Project for Public Spaces, n.d.), has had an innovative impact on the cultural vitality of public libraries in several states. Project for Public Spaces, which provides a hub for training, resources, and best practice for placemaking projects, argues that public libraries can become vibrant cultural destinations "which matter" to communities by utilizing a placemaking "inside/outside" approach. As an example, ImaginOn children's library and theater in Charlotte, North Carolina, hosts an annual Wordplay Saturday event that "brings stories to life" by providing "performances inside the library and activities outside" transforming "Charlotte into a giant party for kids" (Nikitin and Jackson, 2009). Another example, in Frankfort, Indiana, highlights how, by adopting an inclusive understanding of cultural engagement "which is based on the philosophy 'we can make our life a work of art'" (Smallwood 2013, 215), the library can become an everyday cultural hub of local life. By working with the community to develop and provide "a broad range of activities emphasizing art, performance, and creativity" (Nikitin and Jackson 2009), from piano lessons inside to gardening groups outside, the library provides the local community opportunities for collaboration, development, and enrichment.

In summary, public libraries, as shown by the synthesis of good practice distilled from the illustrative examples discussed, provide numerous, regular, and varied opportunities for collaboration, creativity, development, interaction, and enrichment in the cultural context. Public libraries in Lyon, France, and St. Helens, UK, involved and connected local communities with local culture by focusing on both cultural content and context. In Frankfort, Indiana, a further emphasis on the local area can be appreciated, with the library promoted and recognized as an everyday cultural hub of local life. Public libraries in Blackpool, UK, and Charlotte, North Carolina, adopted vibrant and dynamic approaches to bring culture out of the library space directly into the community, whereas public libraries in Lancashire and St. Helens in the United Kingdom brought community-created culture into the library space. As highlighted, although the holistic cultural role of public libraries can stimulate cultural consumption, participation, and engagement within communities and so generate cultural cap-

ital, there is a need for empirical evidence to support the benefits of this cultural role, particularly in disadvantaged communities. This process could be better achieved, understood, and advocated in library and information science by utilizing and building on existing cultural capital research in other domains.

Building on Existing Cultural Capital Research

As identified in examples of public library good practice, although a wealth of material may demonstrate the generation of cultural capital by public libraries, there remains a need to define the concept in practice and to identify the key indicators that demonstrate the impact of cultural capital. Authors such as Savolainen (1999) have highlighted "problems in the 'translation' of Bourdieu's concepts into the vocabulary of LIS" (18). As a result, there is a lack of research studies that demonstrate the library's role in developing cultural competencies among disadvantaged groups, the key factors influencing intergroup behaviors outside the public library context, and the extent to which cultural capital contributes to social inclusion and community engagement. However, existing cultural capital research within the library and information science domain provides a useful starting point from which to better understand the public library role in enabling cultural consumption, participation, and engagement.

Cultural capital research addressing reading habits and preferences can be useful for public libraries in developing methods of generating cultural capital via the promotion of cultural consumption. Studies that replicate research methods used by Bourdieu ([1984] 2010), retaining unhelpful value distinctions between different genres and mediums of reading materials, may not sit comfortably with an inclusive contemporary public library ethos (Goulding 2008); however, their findings should still be of interest. For example, a study of contemporary cultural practices in Britain, while providing evidence of a specific decline in book reading within "urban, educated and cosmopolitan populations" (Bennett et al. 2010, 110), also found that among a representative sample of UK residents "98 per cent are involved in some form of reading" (Bennett et al. 2010, 94). These findings present challenges and opportunities for public libraries to facilitate cultural capital utilizing mechanisms of "active intervention" such as reader development programs (Opening the Book, n.d.). Focusing on readers' responses to books (Sullivan 2001) and the "power" cultural objects can "exert over agents through their meaningfulness" (Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone 1993, 33), as opposed to distinctions of inherent value, can encourage, enable, and empower readers by recognizing the value of reading in all forms. For libraries, fostering a love of reading helps individuals to build cultural capital by aiding their personal development and ability to engage in wider cultural production and participation (Howard 2011).

Cultural participation can be a "contributory agent for change . . . improving the quality of life of a person and his/her community" (Vermeersch and Vandenbroucke 2014, 54). Social research has evidenced the benefits of cultural participation both to the individual, in terms of

increased happiness and personal enrichment (Kim and Kim 2009), good health, and satisfaction with life (Leadbetter and O'Connor 2013), and to communities, in relation to social cohesion (Jeannotte 2003) and neighborhood regeneration (Bridge 2006). However, among socially excluded groups and those with low levels of education, cultural participation levels are low (Myerscough 2011; Leadbetter and O'Connor 2013; Scottish Government 2016). For community-based cultural institutions like public libraries, theories of cultural capital can place participation data in context and aid the identification of appropriate intervention points to reach excluded groups. Of interest to public libraries should be research focusing on the influence of parental cultural capital on the cultural behaviors and practices of young people (Sullivan 2001; Nagel 2010; Willekens and Lievens 2014; Manchester and Pett 2015). By working with new parents with low levels of cultural capital to aid and promote development of the "cultural and social competencies that are rooted in family upbringing" (Edgerton, Roberts, and Peter 2013, 304), libraries can help to break the cycle of cultural disengagement among children not encouraged to participate in cultural activities (Scottish Government 2010).

Recent methods of facilitating cultural capital among disadvantaged groups within the education sector provide two distinct approaches that could be utilized by public libraries in the planning and delivery of community engagement projects, which specifically involve cultural activities. In Scotland, Donald Gillies and colleagues (2010) examined the "cultural intermediary" role of a school in an area of extreme deprivation in facilitating the development of the "relevant" cultural capital needed to "cope and succeed in a system which can be quite distinct" (30) from the pupils' own culture. In the United States, Kate Wegmann and Gary L. Bowen (2010) showed how a school sought to "build connections" with the local community by adopting an inclusive understanding of cultural capital that recognized and embraced "the cultural strengths and assets that diverse families" (7) can possess. Arguably, the first method of facilitating cultural capital may seem more in line with the traditional role of libraries and librarians as cultural intermediaries (Goulding 2008), both of which satisfy and shape the tastes of the communities they serve via the collections they "legitimize" by providing (Bouthillier 2000). However, approaching cultural capital generation from a deficit model perspective based on the "externally perceived needs" (Overall 2009, 179) of the community is at odds with the "positive" and "dynamic" (Pateman and Vincent 2010, 121) relationships that contemporary libraries foster. Instead, community engagement programs that "inform," "consult," "involve," "empower," "stem from," and "belong to" (Sung, Hepworth, and Ragsdell 2012, 211) local communities provide an inclusive model for enabling cultural engagement.

Examining public libraries through the lens of cultural capital could provide a useful tool for understanding relations between a number of issues of professional and wider societal concern, such as a decline in library book lending (Breslin and McMenemy 2006) and contemporary reading habits (Bennett et al. 2010), the engagement of vulnerable families with library services (Goulding 2006) and cultural disengagement in the home (Edgerton et al. 2013), the

development of collaborative alternatives to outreach (Pateman and Vincent 2010), and the inclusive engagement approaches proving successful in other sectors (Wegmann and Bowen 2010). However, a library and information science-focused research agenda is needed that provides better understanding of the library role in developing cultural competencies among disadvantaged groups, the key factors influencing intergroup behaviors within the public library context, and the extent to which cultural capital contributes to social inclusion and community engagement. Operationalizing the concept to enable the identification of public library-specific indicators and benefits is of importance, as such indicators would provide empirical evidence of the key sociocultural role of public libraries, particularly in disadvantaged circumstances, and in so doing might provide a mechanism of better evidencing and advocating the value of public libraries. While this could prove a challenge, given the fluid nature of cultural capital and the entrenched difficulties in defining the concept's meaning and identifying its effects (Dumais 2002, 49), the ability to do so could be vital to the future of public libraries (Baker and Evans 2011, 8).

Conclusion

Cultural capital forms part of the rich fabric of social life and can be a major form of social inequality, particularly in disadvantaged circumstances. Public libraries, by providing a vibrant, inclusive, and trusted community hub for people from all walks of life to come together to access, share, create, appropriate, and appreciate cultural resources and materials, can alleviate inequality by enabling wider cultural consumption, participation, and engagement. As cultural intermediaries, libraries and librarians enable and encourage the development of knowledge, skill, taste, and experience in the cultural context, from the consumption of cultural products to active participation in cultural activities and, ultimately, to sustained cultural engagement. Although, to date, application of the concept of cultural capital within library and information science may be limited, generating cultural capital—the cultural competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, and education) that facilitate cultural participation and symbolize cultural capacity and authority (Bourdieu [1984] 2010)—arguably resonates with both the purpose and practice of public libraries.

For public libraries, facilitating the generation of cultural capital symbolizes the developmental role of the library in helping individuals not just to access but also to appropriate, appreciate, and share culture. Adopting a broad, inclusive, and nonjudgmental understanding of culture facilitates the integration of cultural forms and activities into everyday life within and across communities. Examples of good practice in public libraries include directly connecting communities with both cultural content and context; promoting the library as both a trusted place to engage in familiar cultural behaviors and a vibrant space to experience new cultural forms; involving and connecting local communities with local culture; providing numerous,

regular, and varied opportunities for collaboration, creativity, development, interaction, and enrichment; taking culture outside the library into the community and bringing community-created culture into the library; and recognizing and promoting the library as an everyday cultural hub of local life.

Viewing public libraries through the theoretical lens of cultural capital can help libraries to better define and advocate their role in developing and fostering cultural consumption, participation, and engagement and, in particular, address issues of cultural divide through better understanding of cognitive and affective barriers to participation. However, further research is arguably needed within the academic and professional library and information science community to operationalize the concept in practice. There is a need for further empirical studies providing evidence of the library's role in developing cultural competencies among disadvantaged groups, the key factors influencing cultural participation, and the extent to which cultural capital contributes to social inclusion and community engagement. Such a focused research agenda will advance our understanding of the important sociocultural role of public libraries, particularly for users in disadvantaged circumstances.

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