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The Intersection of Community Engagement and Library Science

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Abstract

A community is not just a place where people live, but an aggregation of folks brought together, whether by chance or design, who share like avocations. This article details frameworks for community engagement, and also identifies the discernible intersection between community engagement work and librarianship. The main focus is to look at these intersecting fields and establish what can be done to elevate a cohesive, homogeneous patron experience and embrace the larger community as a whole.

Keywords

community engagement, involvement, library science, librarianship, participation

Introduction

When one initially hears the term “community,” the first things thought of might be a city, town, or neighborhood. These terms are certainly accurate, but a community really is so much more than that. A community is any group of people with shared interests, values, customs, or attitudes who come together to meet prevailing needs. Just like people, communities can vary greatly. For example, families, friends, organizations, clubs, teams, schools, and faith groups are different types of communities. Moving beyond just the physical aspect, a community is a feeling of belonging, acceptance, trust, and appreciation. Members of a community socialize and interact with one another, and through shared experiences, bond with one another. Communities bring people together, and most often hold people together due to their reciprocal nature. Meeting common needs is a key aspect of a community. For this reason, most people are members of multiple communities, depending upon what one’s needs may be. Communities can

also be interconnected, where a larger community holds a smaller community. For example, a city (the larger community) may have a cultural neighborhood within it (the smaller community). All of these types of communities, while very different, are necessary for people to feel supported, safe, secure, and connected to others around us. This article not only details frameworks for community engagement, but also calls attention to the intersection between community engagement work and librarianship. The overarching goal is to look at these intersecting fields and determine what can be done to promote an integrated patron experience and embrace the wider community.

Frameworks for Community Engagement

A. Sense of Community

The Sense of Community (SOC) theory was first developed by researcher David W. McMillan in 1976, and was further expanded upon in 1986 by McMillan, as well as colleague, David M. Chavis. The article, "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory" by Chavis and McMillan (1986), reviewed related literature and previously done research to determine where weaknesses, gaps, and deficiencies lie pertaining to the essence of a "sense of community," in an effort to create a description and attributes of community belongingness as a whole. Chavis and McMillan began by proposing four criteria for a definition and theory of sense of community. They determined that the definition/theory should be unambiguous, its components should be identifiable, it should "represent intimacy implicit in the term," and "it needs to provide a dynamic description of the development and maintenance of the experience" (p. 9). They then determined that the definition would contain four specific elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The definition Chavis and

McMillan constructed reads as follows, “Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Expanding on the research of McMillan and Chavis, this section intends to define, critique, and show the application of the Sense of Community theory in a real-world context.

In September of 2010, researchers Branda Nowell and Neil Boyd published an article titled, “Viewing Community as Responsibility as well as Resource: Deconstructing the Theoretical Roots of Psychological Sense of Community,” in which they critique and critically analyze McMillan and Chavis’ Sense of Community theory and framework. Nowell and Boyd look at the concepts and assessments made by McMillan and Chavis, and specifically focus on “identifying the embedded theoretical lens through which we have come to view sense of community” (p. 289). With this in mind, Nowell and Boyd argue that sense of community is “oriented toward a human needs theory perspective that emphasizes the extent to which one’s community is viewed as a resource for meeting physical and psychological needs” (p. 289). They suggest that the Sense of Community theory presented by McMillan and Chavis is too elementary for what is a more complex topic, and further assert that it is a needs-based theory that ignores responsibility as part of Sense of Community. The goal of Nowell and Boyd’s research was really to advance the development and evolution of the Sense of Community theory and framework. To do this, they set out to clarify and explain McMillan and Chavis’ Sense of Community theory, as it currently stood. From there, they presented the human needs theory as a macro framework for delineating the definition and application of Sense of Community. Nowell and Boyd then brought to light the limitations of McMillan and Chavis’ Sense of Community theory and framework, which they argue is exclusively needs-driven, rather than responsibility-

driven. With this in mind, the researchers recommended examining other theoretically grounded viewpoints, and suggest the overall benefit of doing so (p. 838). Lastly, Nowell and Boyd pulled from research done by scholars, James G. March and Johan Olsen, specifically looking at their logic of appropriateness, in an effort to provide a different theoretical base, namely, a sense of community as responsibility. Nowell and Boyd point out how this theoretical perspective can convey new frameworks for understanding the connection between sense of community, psychological well-being, and community engagement (p. 839).

Interestingly, David W. McMillan published a response to Nowell and Boyd, in a 2011 article titled, "Sense of Community, a Theory Not a Value: A Response to Nowell and Boyd." In this article, McMillan summarizes the above-mentioned article, and then goes on to clarify the theory he and Chavis originally presented. He notes that while Nowell and Boyd acknowledge the four elements (membership, influence, integration of fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection) in their theory, they overlook the specific diction used when analyzing the elements and sub-elements of the theory and framework. In McMillan and Chavis (1986), McMillan explains the "complex relationships among the elements with reinforcing interactions and formulas for how ingredients in the sense of community recipe come together"- something that Nowell and Boyd may have missed. Although McMillan agrees with Nowell and Boyd in that the Sense of Community Index (SCI) is insufficient for measuring Sense of Community as a whole, he points out that that was in fact the very reason why he and researchers, Peterson and Speer, developed the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS), a tool that can provide a brief measure of the theory, but does not represent the whole theory (p. 510). McMillan states that his theory is not simply needs-based and argues that Nowell and Boyd ignore the first element in its entirety. He points out, "although the first element describes boundaries, emotional safety, and

sense of belonging as essential to sense of community, implied is the responsibility that members have to protect the community's boundaries, to be honest, open and transparent, and to be welcoming and accepting of members" (p. 510). McMillan also rejects Nowell and Boyd's thoughts on the second element, influence, which they define as a "need for power… motivation rooted in a desire to shape circumstances and influence others" (p. 833). McMillan iterates the fact that this element has more to do with a member's adherence, obligation, and commitment to the community, rather than that of power-seeking. Building on this, he also mentions that "although this might be tied to needs and not responsibility, the sub elements of our theory strongly imply that members have a duty to be responsible toward their community" (p. 511). McMillan also rebuffs the notion that his theory is too simplistic and only scratches the surface of sense of community. In fact, McMillan argues that the diction and articulation chosen when developing the theory and framework was quite intentional. Norwell and Boyd also indicate that the SOC theory illustrates the need people have to affiliate with organizations and those around them, and of this, McMillan agrees. He states the theory has, "elements of group cohesion, attachment, and bonding. It connects to our genitals, our stomachs, and our souls. It is related to values like responsibility, but it is not a value" (p. 512). While Norwell and Boyd determined to create a standard sense of community theory, McMillan holds that his is empirical, and does not make any efforts to manipulate or alter reality. Speaking again of the incorporation of responsibility into the Sense of Community theory and framework, McMillan asserts that the theory's sub-elements include several components that portray social responsibility, although he recognizes that they didn't surface as primary segments of the elements (p. 513). In addition to these concerns, McMillan also takes issue with the base of Norwell and Boyd's critique, which pulls heavily from the work of James G. March and Johan Olsen, the work of which, has been

highly criticized by researcher Kjell Goldmann, who found numerous erroneous details and inaccuracies with their work. McMillan concludes by saying," it would be wonderful if Nowell and Boyd are correct, that responsibility is a powerful force in bringing people together. And if it isn't, community psychologists should join with Nowell and Boyd encouraging responsibility to become a more powerful human motivator. But they shouldn't insist it be part of a reality when it is not (p. 518).

To demonstrate how McMillan's Sense of Community theory and framework can be applied to real-world context, Diane E. Johnson's article, "Faith, Hope, Tolerance, and Sense of Community" (2011), discusses data captured from a student-experience study at a college preparatory high school. It analyzes "student reports of the changes they experienced as they progressed through the Academy, building faith, faith in each other and in themselves, hope, necessary to support long-term investment, and tolerance, sufficient to find in their diversity the resources they need to fulfill their dreams" (p. 151). While Johnson leans heavily on the original elements set forth by McMillan and Chavis (1986), they also look at McMillan's revised elements (1996): spirit, trust, trade, and art. These revised elements offered a contemporary way of thinking about community. Specifically, Johnson found that, in terms of their school experiences, students seemed to need to move past the original elements, and focus more on the revised elements, which they see as working to, "foster a sense of belonging, mutual caring, and responsibility, as they accommodate to diversity and extend the boundaries of this community, adapting to a larger and larger range of environments- including the academic environment of higher education" (p.156). This is similar to the work of Nowell and Boyd, in which they adapted McMillian and Chavis' theory to present the human needs theory as a macro framework for outlining the definition and application of Sense of Community. Since the conventional

theory of community that includes aspects like membership, shared values, and common symbol systems does not directly apply to the Academy as far as student's perceptions of communities, Johnson found that the collected data indicates that the Sense of Community theory be expanded upon. Looking at the importance of freedom from shame within a community, an aspect McMillan pointed out in 1996, Johnson found that students felt freedom from shame, as well as their growing ability to refrain from shaming others, was especially important within their school community. Another crucial aspect is the concept that an educational setting should be a holistic environment that is benefiting and motivating the student as a whole, and continuously expanding the student's personal development. According to Johnson, "This school is a community that prepares students to find community with their fellows and to continue to grow together wherever they find themselves" (p. 165). Johnson also points out that the Academy is an environment in which students can choose their own path and their future, and relates this to McMillan's (1996) idea of being accepted authentically. To analyze the students and the Academy itself, Johnson set out by reviewing McMillan's Sense of Community theory, as well as his revised elements. Based on this, Johnson says, "This is a community founded in acceptance and authenticity, just authority, a fruitful exchange of resources, and the collective creation of narratives that resonate the transformation of their lives. Associated with these elements is growth in reflexivity and intersubjectivity, in person mastery, in boundary maintaining behaviors, and in individual autonomy, self-esteem, and sense of self efficacy" (p. 164). As you can see, Johnson's research directly relates to, and is anchored on McMillan's Sense of Community theory.

Because understanding the many types of communities within our society is so crucial, the definition and theory put forth by Chavis and McMillan (1986) is of great importance.

Specifically, because of the way it was written, their definition and theory can be applied to all communities equally, although each of the elements individually may be more pertinent to one community than another due to the precise membership or makeup of that particular community. Due to their flexibility and adaptability, the elements presented by Chavis and McMillan "can provide a framework for comparing and contrasting various communities" (p. 19). Their definition and theory of sense of community can serve as a foundation for legislators, community administrators, and even libraries to create events that align with their objectives by bolstering and supporting the community.

B. Social Capital

In the article, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* (1995), political scientist and scholar, Robert Putnam, discusses the overwhelming evidence that communities that are civically engaged and that are socially connected tend to be more successful. He also reveals that the United States has undergone a remarkable decline in social capital since the 1960's, which has ultimately led to significant negative consequences. The concept of social capital is best explained as, "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67). Systems of civic engagement promote cooperation and bolster social trust. These systems also aid in coordination, cooperation, and strengthen reputations. Putnam takes the idea that social connections and civic engagement extensively impact our life both publicly and privately, and uses it as the jumping off point for an empirical survey of trends in social capital in America. Putnam speaks in great detail about the decline in government trust, as well as the decline civic engagement in a variety of areas including voting, public/town meetings, political rallies/speeches, work for political

parties, church related groups, labor unions, societies, school-service groups, sports clubs, verteran's groups, etc. In regard to social trust, he found that Americans who socialize with neighbors have decreased, as well as the proportion of Americans who say that people can generally be trusted. Putnam concludes that, "Members of associations are much more likely than nonmembers to participate in politics, to spend time with neighbors, to express social trust, and so on" (p. 73). Expanding on the research of Robert Putnam, the intention of this segment is to ascertain, examine, and administer the concept of social capital to a tangible environment.

In the 2007 article, *Determinants of Social Capital: New Evidence on Religion, Diversity and Structural Change*, author Marcus Alexander uses the research of Robert Putnam (1995) as a foundation to expand upon the concept of social capital. Alexander first examines the relationship between equality and social capital, as well as the relationship between diversity and social capital. As Putnam previously mentioned, Alexander, too, points out that as mobility within the U.S. increases, society will become more diverse, and in turn, more unequal. In this research, Alexander found that there was a downward-sloping relationship between both diversity and social capital, as well as poverty and social capital. Likewise, he also found that there is a negative correlation between the level of social capital and those living below the poverty line. Next, Alexander introduces an empirical analysis of variations of social capital across American states. To do this, Alexander investigates Putnam's "counter trends" in order to determine if these elements can clarify the differences in levels of social capital state-by-state. Alexander explains, "The argument behind this approach is that an explanation of what influences levels of social capital over time should also hold some power in explaining variation in levels of social capital across space" (p. 371). While he notes that this approach has its limitations, he asserts that looking at individual states is the best preliminary step to take.

Expanding on Putnam's counter trends, Alexander proposes two additional features-diversity and education, which "directly engage alternative explanations of social capital levels" (p. 371). Unlike Putnam's findings, Alexander found that educational attainment plays a very important role in determining the fluctuation of social capital levels. For example, a state is likely to have higher levels of social capital if that state has more college graduates. Similarly, states with higher percentages of farmers or farm households, have higher levels of social capital than those that do not. As these two wildly different variables are the most consistent determinants of social capital, it makes it difficult to determine social capital levels overall. Of the results, Alexander explains, "The change in farming levels captures an important aspect of social change that accompanies the much wider process of industrialization across the United States and across time" (p. 371). These findings lead Alexander to question what type of engagement Putnam was actually measuring and whether or not the decline in social capital that he observed is, on the whole, irreversible (p. 371). When looking at economic determinants of social capital, Alexander found that both unemployment levels, as well as church attendance, are negatively correlated with social capital. Interestingly, Alexander's research concluded that states with higher poverty rates had higher levels of social capital. He points out that people should be "careful in assigning too much importance on economic causes, as unemployment is the only statistically significant determinant" (p. 372). Alexander goes on to discuss how the analysis can affect comparative politics and development, and states that the analysis can help to "gain further understanding into the theory of social capital, as well as the application of the theory to issues in economic development and the comparative study of democratic systems" (p. 374). While Putnam's findings focused on racial and ethic diversity, including illegal immigration levels, the information presented by Alexander ties social capital to "unemployment patterns, the decline of

farming, the rise of education levels and the persistent role of religion" (p. 376), aspects that structurally form the integrity of the economy and politics in America. This point implores us to ask the question whether or not it is the framework that facilitates thinking about structural change. Alexander concludes his research by highlighting limitations, and indicates that a more critical and analytic method must be taken when examining the link between social capital and democracy.

While Alexander expanded upon Putnam's work, Italian professor and sociologist, Pierpaolo Donati, offers critique and criticism of Putnam's social capital theory in his 2013 article, *Social Capital and Associative Democracy: A Relational Perspective*. Donati argues that Putnam's (1995) theory falls short when analyzing the idea of social capital with civic culture. He asserts that civic culture, associative democracy, and social capital are distinct concepts, while also being co-related. Depending on social circumstances and undercurrents, Donati claims that each of these three notions can affect one another and have the possibility of joining together in a variety of ways. With this in mind, Donati offers a new archetype, which he designates as, "relational," that was tested in a sequence of empirical surveys. By using social networks to better understand social capital and the effects thereof, researchers can provide improved explanations of new and developing associational realities, which are not apparent in previous studies, like that of Putnam's, that concentrate on sociocultural structures and individuals. It is Donati's view that believing that social capital is a combined culture, locally or nationally, is a feeble assumption, which reflects the "myth of cultural integration," that was scrutinized by researcher Margaret Archer in her 1985 article. Building on this, Donati explains, "To define SC in terms of cultural integration cannot help but meet further disconfirmations due to the increasing cultural pluralization inherent to a multicultural society fueled by ceaseless

immigration processes" (p. 42). Donati concludes that it is inappropriate to assert that the idea of social capital, as it presently stands, “overlaps with civic culture, and that civic culture is a synonym for civil values" (p. 42). He believes that the concept of social capital does not mirror outdated notions, but is necessary to differentiate between civic and civil cultures, and further argues that in order to move forward, a relational theory of social capital must be created.

Researcher and scholar, Mary V. Alfred, presents the theory of social capital from a feminist perspective in relation to networking and adult education in the article, *Social Capital Theory: Implications for Women's Networking and Learning* (2009). Utilizing the research of Robert Putnam (1995), Alfred describes social capital as a dynamic commodity of interpersonal systems, association, awareness, and similar human resources. She explains that when these components are looked at as a whole, they are exceedingly beneficial to both groups and individuals for a wide range of needs and interests. According to Alfred, “Women are rich in these valuable assets, which often manifest in group solidarity and shared identity, brought about by exploitation, discrimination, or exclusion from key civic roles and hierarchical positions” (p. 8). How social capital among women varies is important as social capital theories in previous research centers on organizational structures and relationships, without recognizing power dynamics that develop from gender differences. Looking through a feminist lens, Alfred contends that women should not be placed “uncritically within existing frameworks of social capital but should interrogate the ways by which traditional theories of social capital treat women as a nongendered group and places them un-problematically at the center of community life” (p. 8). In general, feminist scholars believe that social separations of gender, age, and class are linked to disproportionate allocation of resources and access to organizations and groups that can provide important information relating to how females can bolster their career, life and overall

development. Aside from Putnam, Alfred also draws upon the research of Ian Falk and Sue Kilpatrick (2000), who indicate that social capital comes from learning and gaining knowledge in a social, political, and cultural environment. Researchers Falk and Kilpatrick suggest that the essential attributes of these educational dealings are “reciprocity, trust, shared norms, and values” (p. 10), which is similar to Putnam’s thoughts, although in a different context. According to Alfred, Falk and Kilpatick theorize that the more often these educational interactions occur, the greater the ability to gain social capital resources. Alfred goes on to declare, “To better understand how women learn and construct knowledge from their interactions with social networks and ties, it is necessary to broaden our view of learning to one that goes beyond formal, institutional learning to include learning that takes place in networks and communities” (p. 10). There is an overall consensus that adult education can provide a pathway for the advancement and expansion of social capital, although, for students to cultivate this social capital, they must be prepared to interact in different ways, in unfamiliar situations, and with new people. Of this, Alfed explains, “an individual’s knowledge and skills are not enough to develop social capital relationships; the norms of the group within which the resources circulate play a crucial role” (p. 11). To build social networks where the learner can actively prosper socially and psychologically, classroom communities must be created where a strong priority is placed on common norms, collective respect, and a joint effort to promote and cultivate diversity. An example of this is learning groups or learning commons, a popular aspect of adult learning, where support systems are frequently created and career opportunities often emerge. In addition to these specialized programs and learning modalities, adult education as a whole also assists in the development of networking and the building of relationships with outside organizations. Environments such as these are exceedingly influential for social capital to cultivate. To

culminate, Alfred states that, “even though there are inherent risks with social capital networks, with deliberate intent the classroom and the adult learning program can foster social capital development whereby learners capitalize on the resources to improve their living conditions and those of partner members” (p. 11). On this note, it’s important to remember that the benefits and advantages of social capital acquired via networking should work in a reciprocal fashion and all parties involved should be given the chance to not only contribute resources within the community, but also to participate in various aspects and functions of that community. For example, libraries are spaces where community members can gather free of bias or fear of being discriminated against. Libraries bring community members together, often bringing together individuals that might not have otherwise had the opportunity to interact with one another. Libraries offer a space where information can be shared, where learning can take place, and where ideas and opinions can be developed. For this reason, libraries are in a unique position where they are able to bring different groups of people together, including those who are experiencing homelessness. Libraries can generate social capital for the betterment of this population by hosting various support groups, holding food/clothing drives, and by offering help finding resources pertaining to shelters, safe houses, government resources, employment opportunities, and resume writing, to name a few. In this sense, libraries are the type of environment that promotes reciprocal social capital building, rather than just transactional.

The concept of social capital put forth by Robert Putnam (1995) is of great significance because it provides overwhelming evidence that communities that are civically engaged and that are socially connected tend to be more successful. It also illustrates how systems of civic engagement promote cooperation and bolster social trust. Putnam’s research serves as a foundation for other researchers to build upon and implement into everyday circumstances. As

with any research or proposed theory, Putnam's idea of social capital has been reviewed and scrutinized by his critics. This is not necessarily a bad thing however, as it not only allows for limitations to be discovered, but it also allows for his original ideas to be expanded upon based on the ever changing society around us.

C. Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was developed in 1989 by civil rights advocate, lawyer, and scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw, as a way to explain how an individual's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) may overlap, creating the possibility for a distinct form of discrimination. The article, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color*, written by Crenshaw, discusses the concept of intersectionality and how it pertains to politics and women who are also people of color. Crenshaw sets out to convey that the problem with identity politics is that it often overlooks or merges intra group differences. To really illustrate what she means by "intersectionality," Crenshaw provides the case of a woman of color who sued a company for hiring discrimination. The woman made the claim that although the company did hire black men for labor positions and women for support positions, black women were not hired for either. It is at this intersection of her race and gender where the legal erasure occurs. Expanding on this concept, when speaking of violence against women, Crenshaw explains that omitting any of these characteristics is precarious because many times this violence is in conjunction with some other element (i.e. race, gender, class, etc.). Unlike racism and sexism that commonly intersected in people's lives, feminist and antiracist practices did not. Crenshaw explains that when these practices delineate identity as "women " *or* "person of color," "they regulate the identity of women of color to a

location that resists telling" (p. 8). Crenshaw's goal is to "advance the telling of that location by exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color" (p. 8). Looking specifically at rape and battering, Crenshaw explored how these experiences of women of color are often the result of intersecting experiences of racism and sexism and how these experiences are not often included in feminist or antiracist discussion. Due to this intersection as women *and* people of color, the welfare and interests of women of color are often marginalized within both populations. This frequently leaves women of color feeling isolated or alone as they have no way to really link themselves to either of these communities. In turn this complicates efforts to politicize gender violence within populations of people of color, which allows these issues to remain undiscussed. Crenshaw suggests that "intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 16). Expanding on the ideas and work of Kimberle Crenshaw, this component attempts to define, analyze, and employ the concept of intersectionality to practical, everyday situations.

In the 2013 article, *Identity Categories as Potential Coalitions*, author Anna Carastathis builds upon Crenshaw's work in *Mapping the Margins*. Carastathis takes a critical look at Crenshaw's recommendation to think of identity groups as coalitions or potential coalitions that are not yet formed. Carastathis asserts that thinking of identity groups as coalitions, allows for the organization of political coalitions that intersect with identity categories and for the development of interconnected politics. She sees intersectionality as a way to frame identity, much like researchers Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp. Like Crenshaw, Carastathis contends that as long as identity categories are thought of as coalitions, identity groups continue to be a favorable foundation for political organizing. Carastathis explains further, "Identity politics is often contrasted with coalitional politics in that the former is viewed as a kind of

separatism based on sameness while the latter depends on alliances built across differences. Yet this distinction between identity and coalition focuses exclusively on differences between groups, failing to consider differences within groups, which an intersectional critique of identity categories illuminates" (p. 941). According to Carastathis, there are two schools of thought when it comes to thinking about identity groups and intersectionality. The first, identifies intersectionality as “consisting of merging, compounding, adding, joining, or uniting discrete, mutually exclusive, and stable categories of identity (race and gender, paradigmatically) that (on these accounts) correspond to discrete—if intersecting—systems of power” (p. 961). The other, is interested in investigating Crenshaw’s assertion regarding identity groups as coalitions which “allows us to envision a counterhegemonic interpretation of intersectionality” (p. 961). Building on Crenshaw’s research, Carastathis explains, that for those in intersecting, oppressed groups, recognizing identity groups in as coalitions moves the attention to, “the multiplicity and contradictions of our identities disregarded by social movements that have failed to grasp the social totality and lived experiences of multiple oppressions in a non-fragmented way” (p. 961). Although Carastathis agreed with, and dug deeper into the work of Crenshaw, not all researchers studying intersectionality had the same thoughts.

Author Barbara Foley’s 2019 article, *Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique*, offers a differing view of intersectionality and Crenshaw’s work. In a Marxist mindset, Foley looks beyond current conditions for inherently oppressive underlying economic structures. Foley acknowledges that people who fall into intersecting identity categories often suffer both mentally and physically from these oppressions, and agrees that the only way issues of social justice can be adequately addressed is by considering the unique experiences faced by these underrepresented populations. However, Foley believes that in an effort to evaluate the

advantages and practicality of intersectionality as "an analytical model and practical program, and to decide whether or not it can actually be said to be a "theory," as a number of its proponents insist—we need to ask not only what kinds of questions it encourages and remedies, but also what kinds of questions it discourages and what kinds of remedies it forecloses" (p. 10). Foley argues that although Crenshaw's model of intersectionality accurately describes Patricia Hill Collins' matrix of oppressions, "the model's spatial two-dimensionality points to its inadequacy as an explanation of why this "matrix" exists in the first place" (p. 10). Foley recounts aspects of Crenshaw's research, specifically, when she demonstrated the double discrimination faced by workers at General Motors. Foley explains that although Crenshaw was successful in showing this discrimination, her model for analysis was restricted to the limits of the law. Foley proposes that although intersectionality can adequately describe the *effects* of compiling oppressions, it does not provide an analytical framework to address the actual *causes* of social and economic inequality in today's capitalist system. Foley goes on to suggest that intersectionality can actually act as an obstacle when critically thinking about, or questioning, the reasons for inequality. While many scholars and experts group the categories of gender, race, and class together, Foley holds that although these groups can be viewed as commensurate identities, they actually need to be analyzed through very different approaches. Foley explains that it is at this point in the research and understanding of intersectionality that oppression and exploitation become exceedingly important. To go deeper into this concept, Foley examines the notion that race does not cause racism, and that gender does not cause sexism. However, she explains, "the ways in which "race" and gender—as modes of oppression—have historically been shaped by the division of labor can and should be understood within the explanatory framework supplied by class analysis, which foregrounds the issue of exploitation, that is, of the profits gained from the

extraction of what Marx called “surplus value” from the labor of those who produce the things that society needs” (p. 11). Foley concludes that “intersectionality is less valuable as an explanatory framework than as an ideological reflection of the times in which it has moved into prominence” (p. 12). Although Foley agrees with Crenshaw’s broad concept of intersectionality, she offers a critical look at the originally proposed model and presents questions to dive deeper into the “whys” and “hows” of inequality.

With so many overlapping identity categories, the intersectionality theory can be applied in numerous environments and situations. In their 2011 article, *Applying Intersectionality & Complexity Theory to Address the Social Determinants of Women’s Health*, researchers Elizabeth McGibbon and Charmaine McPhearson explore the intersectionality theory through a feminist lens. These researchers illustrate how the intersectionality theory can be applied in combination with the complexity theory to back the improving inequalities in the social determinants relating to women’s health. McGibbon and McPhearson examine how these theories work together to advance people’s perception of the socio-economic marginalization of women (p. 59). The goal of this research is to generate discussion and raise awareness regarding how intersectionality, feminist political economy, and the complexity theory logically complement each other, specifically when it comes to developing public policy to bring to light the inequalities of social determinants in women’s health. McGibbon and McPhearson explain, “Local, regional, national, and international systems of inequity are inextricably linked and cannot be ameliorated without an analytic focus on how these complex systems act together in a complex web of larger systems that coalesce to produce growing health and social inequities for women” (p. 71-72). Even though the feminist intersectionality theory permits people to think about, and to predict, the ways in which oppressions can overlap to exuberate a women’s

hardships and personal burdens, McGibbon and McPhearson contend that it doesn't quite hit the mark when explaining the synergies within this network of larger systems, specifically, the health and social service systems. To address this, McGibbon and McPhearson pull in the complexity theory, which regards the public service system as an intricate yet flexible system (p. 72). They believe that this theory, in combination with the intersectionality theory, has the potential to delve deep into the intricacies that are ingrained in health disparities.

To explain how these theories and networks can come together in everyday life, McGibbon and McPhearson use a scenario featuring a girl named Marya, who suffers from a chronic health condition, and the barriers (which are all related to intersections of social determinants of health), her family faces when trying to pursue care. The inequalities Marya faces are quite complex. Marya is in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Neither of her parents received an advanced education because they did not have the funds to go to college, which lead both parents to acquire jobs that provide a yearly income that is insufficient to support a family or to save money for unexpected expenses, such as a sudden chronic health condition. Other obstacles that interfere with proper care include transportation to and from appointments, as well as funds to pay for medications and rehabilitative devices. All of these different barriers are all interconnected, and deal with inequalities pertaining to social class, disability, race, classism, ableism, and racism (p. 76). McGibbon and McPhearson believe that by using the complexity theory approach, the solution to overcome these socio-economic issues was straightforward. Of their solution, they explain, "Public policy design and implementation must demonstrate considerably better accommodation of these complex, structural roots of SDH inequities. Feminist intersectionality theory further augments this analysis by underscoring how intersections of gender, social class, and childhood disability further compound the daily

struggles of Marya's family. Taken together, complex adaptive systems theory and feminist intersectionality theory create a view into the complex landscape of inequity" (p.76). The complexity theory, when merged with the intersectionality theory, illustrates the very complicated and troublesome intersections of inequality.

McGibbon and McPhearson's example of Marya presents the need for a complex adaptive systems approach when making public policies pertaining to inequalities relating to social determinants of health. It also illustrates how important it is for the complexity of intersectionality to be understood. The scenario effectively illustrates how feminist intersectionality theory, inequities related to social determinants of health, and the complexity theory can bolster public policy for dynamic social change (p. 79).

Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 as a way to explain how an individual's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) may overlap, creating the possibility for a distinct form of discrimination. Since then, Anna Carastathis has built upon Crewnshaw's work and has taken a critical look at Crenshaw's recommendation to think of identity groups as coalitions. Carastathis maintains that thinking of identity groups as coalitions, allows for the organization of political coalitions that intersect with identity categories and for the development of interconnected politics. Unlike Crenshaw and Carastathis, Barbara Foley offers a differing view of intersectionality, proposing that although intersectionality can adequately describe the *effects* of compiling oppressions, it does not provide an analytical framework to address the actual *causes* of social and economic inequality. With the work of Crenshaw in mind, Elizabeth McGibbon and Charmaine McPhearson present a real-world look at how the intersectionality theory can be applied in combination with the complexity theory to back the improving inequalities in social determinants relating to women's health,

possibly getting to the root causes of these oppressions. Their example demonstrates how feminist intersectionality theory, inequities related to social determinants of health, and the complexity theory can work together to create change in public policy. The concept of intersectionality is extremely complex and intricate, and with it comes various options, perspectives, ideas. When thinking about intersectionality, it's important to conceptualize the struggles and hardships these oppressed populations are dealing with and take into account the inequalities they face on a day-to-day basis.

Community Engagement in Context

As an instruction and liaison librarian, I am a member of the McQuade Library community. Being a McQuade librarian fills me with pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment. As a McQuade librarian, I am able to foster the intellectual growth of the Merrimack College community, promote lifelong learning, participate in varied professional development opportunities, and take part in numerous community service and volunteer activities. This component will examine the McQuade Library community through the lens of two community engagement frameworks (Sense of Community and Democratic Education), as well as two critical tools for community engagement (intersectionality and postmodernism).

The Sense of Community (SOC) theory was originally created by researcher David W. McMillan, and was later amplified by McMillan, along with associate, David M. Chavis. The researchers set out to create a description and highlight attributes of community belongingness as a whole. The definition Chavis and McMillan produced states, "Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p.

9). Their definition and theory of sense of community can serve as a foundation for legislators and community administrators to create events that align with their objectives by bolstering and supporting the community. The SOC theory can be applied in various community settings, including the McQuade Library community.

Being a member of the McQuade Library community fills me with a great sense of belongingness. I not only feel accepted, but I also feel as if I matter to the group, and as if the work I do actually matters, and is appreciated. Because I am welcomed and belong in this community, I take pride in my work, how I present myself, and how I interact with others. I'm confident my co-workers feel similarly. We all work together in our different roles to keep the library running. Although we come from different backgrounds, have different job titles, and skills, no one's job is more important than the next. Everyone in the McQuade community is needed for the library to function. Likewise, if the metaphorical "ball" is dropped, the community goes down as a whole. Because of the reciprocal way the library runs as a team, with everyone depending on each other, members' needs are most often met.

Democratic educators believe that teaching and learning should be a continuous process that goes on throughout a person's life, whether in a formal classroom or not. It is a continuous process that is part of one's real-life experiences (p. 41). Bell Hooks explains that a person who can read and write already has what is needed to pursue a higher education, even if that learning is not in a university classroom. Educators who thrust traditional education on students who are not interested in, or who are unable to attend college, often bring that student's education and will to learn to a standstill. According to Hooks, "Many students stop the practice of learning because they feel learning is no longer relevant to their lives once they graduate from high school unless they plan to attend college" (p. 42). Teaching and learning are unique experiences that

work together enhancing one's whole life. Those in favor of democratic education naturally support literacy and lifelong learning and are always trying to teach beyond the traditional classroom environment. Expanding on this, Hooks says that democratic educators, "do the work of opening up the space of learning so that it can be more inclusive, and challenge ourselves constantly to strengthen our teaching skills" (p. 43). Essentially, democratic educators support the freedom to learn, constructive conversation, collaboration, critical thinking, and equality. When breaking down the concept of democratic education in this basic way, it's easy to see that it directly ties into the work of libraries.

The McQuade Library community interconnects with democratic education seamlessly. Members of this community work together to guarantee people from all backgrounds have equal access to information, the opportunity to become information literate, develop critical thinking skills, and ultimately become lifelong learners. This in turn leverages people to go out into their own communities and become civically and socially engaged. The McQuade Library supports all learners equally, and strives to uphold the principles of social justice for the betterment of communities everywhere.

The concept of intersectionality was developed by Kimberle Crenshaw as a way to explain how an individual's social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) may overlap, creating the possibility for a distinct form of discrimination. Crenshaw sets out to convey that the problem with identity politics is that it often overlooks or merges intra group differences. She suggests that "intersectionality offers a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics" (p. 16). Although Crenshaw's work focuses primarily on the marginalization of women of color, the theory of intersectionality can be applied to various identity combinations.

The McQuade Library community engages with people from all walks of life and all intersections. As an academic library, we serve all genders, people of color, those with disabilities, people of various religions, those experiencing food scarcity, people from both high and low socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. Many of these aspects are overlapping, thus bringing intersectionality into the library. As a member of this community, I work to treat all people with respect, to provide the highest level of service, and to advocate for information literacy and research skills for everyone. In this community, members support all underserved populations and campaign for inclusivity. Upholding the American Library Association's Code of ethics, I support the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources, distinguishing between my personal convictions and professional duties. Members of this community do not allow personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of the institution or the provision of access to their information resources.

Postmodernist educators are advocates for multicultural education and support global service-learning and other study abroad programs. In the postmodern view, immersion into other cultures and cross-cultural conversations and interactions play an important role in the learning process. Postmodern educators encourage teaching about diversity and social justice. Dan W. Butin explains that there is no standard defining service-learning and the different aspects surrounding it. For this reason, he unpacked four different views of service-learning, including a postmodern standpoint. In the postmodern view, service-learning is centralized around how the actual process of service-learning develops, endures, and/or upsets the norms of society. This view focuses specifically on *how* the service-learning works (p. 89). Butin also provides implications for the field of service-learning, and presents the idea that service-learning as a postmodern pedagogy seems, “verged on accepting a highly problematic Faustian bargain of

gaining institutional legitimacy by giving up its transformational opportunities" (p. 101).

In line with the values of the American Library Association (ALA), the McQuade community supports equity, inclusion, and diversity. In my role as an instruction and liaison librarian within the McQuade community, I liaise to the Social Justice department and Women and Gender Studies. I'm the advisor for the Interfaith Alliance (IFA), a student group on campus, and I also participate in the North of Boston Library Exchange's (NOBLE) Inclusive Libraries discussion group. Myself, as well as the other members of this community, routinely participate in volunteer activities and community service events, that help those within the Merrimack community, and the local community as well.

The McQuade Library community was analyzed through the lens of two community engagement frameworks (Sense of Community and Democratic Education), and two critical tools for community engagement (intersectionality and postmodernism). By connecting this community to these specific elements and concepts, the overlap between community engagement work and librarianship is clear. The merging of these two fields shows what a progressive academic library can do, and what else can possibly be done to promote a holistic student experience and welcome the wider community.

Community Engagement in Application

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), on a single January 2019 night, 567,715 people in the United States (about 17 of every 10,000 people) were experiencing homelessness (p. 8). Of people experiencing homelessness, 63% were in sheltered locations while 37% were unsheltered (p. 9). Almost half of the people experiencing homelessness were white (48% or 270,607

people), four of every ten people experiencing homelessness were black or African American (40% or 225,735 people), and over a fifth of all people experiencing homelessness were Hispanic or Latino (22%). Nearly two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness were men or boys (61% or 343,187 men and boys), 39 percent were women or girls (219,911 women and girls), and less than one percent were transgender (3,255 people) or gender non-conforming (1,362 people) (p. 10). This population consists of people from all backgrounds who each face unique challenges. A significant number of those experiencing homelessness are library users. The American Library Association (ALA) supports and advocates for "access to library and information resources, services, and technologies" and believes library access to be "essential for all people, especially the economically disadvantaged, who may experience isolation, discrimination, and prejudice or barriers to education, employment, and housing" (ALA, 2019). Library workers interact with this varied population so frequently, and for this reason, it's important that they are trained how to most effectively respond to their differing needs. Here it is discussed how the issue of homelessness can be addressed through increased community engagement in a library setting.

Political scientist and scholar, Robert Putnam, presents the concept of social capital and explains it as, "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67). Systems of civic engagement promote cooperation and bolster social trust. These systems also aid in coordination, cooperation, and strengthen reputations. Essentially, social capital helps society to function. When a person believes others will put just as much effort into building a community as they are, a trust is formed and in turn, they are more likely to put in more effort themselves. Putnam speaks in great detail about the decline in government trust, as well as the decline civic engagement in a variety of areas including voting, public/town meetings, political

rallies/speeches, work for political parties, church related groups, labor unions, societies, school-service groups, sports clubs, veteran's groups, etc. Putnam explains that, "Members of associations are much more likely than nonmembers to participate in politics, to spend time with neighbors, to express social trust, and so on" (p. 73). The concept of social capital and the idea that groups and individuals can strengthen social trust by working together can be applied to libraries, and more specifically, to those experiencing homelessness who take refuge in libraries.

Typically, libraries are spaces where community members can gather free of bias or fear of being discriminated against. Libraries bring community members together, often bringing together individuals that might not have otherwise had the opportunity to interact with one another. Libraries offer a space where information can be shared, where learning can take place, and where ideas and opinions can be developed. For this reason, libraries are in a unique position where they are able to bring different groups of people together, including those who are experiencing homelessness. Libraries can generate social capital for the betterment of individuals experiencing homelessness by hosting various support groups, holding food/clothing drives, and by offering help finding resources pertaining to shelters, safe houses, government resources, etc.

The Sense of Community (SOC) theory centers around the concept of community belongingness, commitment, and trust. Understanding the many types of communities within our society is crucial, which makes the definition and theory put forth by Chavis and McMillan quite important. Specifically, because of the way it was written, their definition and theory can be applied to all communities equally, although each of the elements individually may be more pertinent to one community than another due to the precise membership or makeup of that particular community (p. 19). This community engagement framework can also be applied to libraries negotiating how to best serve those experiencing homelessness.

Libraries are an asset to, and a fundamental need of, any community. Libraries help to build engaged, thriving communities by connecting individuals and creating bonds, fostering the intellectual development of community members, providing government information, providing equitable access, supporting information literacy, and advocating for civic and social engagement. To help individuals experiencing homelessness feel more at ease in the library, and to create a sense of belonging, libraries could offer programming focusing on particular issues that may be of interest to this group. Programming relating to health (mental and physical), housing assistance, support groups, and applying for government benefits are good starting points. Events like mock interviews or resume clinics may also be of interest to this population. To get more involved in the community, and to ultimately better serve those who are experiencing homelessness, libraries can also work to create partnerships with food banks, shelters and other living facilities, faith-based organizations, health services, and educational institutions. These partnerships can help in strengthening the bonds between community members and community organizations, leading to an increased sense of community.

Similarly, the research of Urie Bronfenbrenner, who developed the ecological systems framework, can be applied to libraries working with people experiencing homelessness. In Bronfenbrenner's framework there are five types of environmental systems- the microsystem, the mesosystem, the ecosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Researcher, Yok-Fong Paat, explains the system as follows: "The ecological environments can be perceived as a constellation of nested subsystems of different sizes concentrating one another from the smaller to the larger" (p. 955). This structure suggests that the social experiences of specific populations cannot be understood without analyzing "the interconnectedness between these multiple layers of social structure" (p. 956). This is particularly important when working with such a high-risk,

underserved population.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory can be applied when training library workers how to better serve people experiencing homelessness. The Ecological Systems Theory implores people to examine the many facets and experiences that make up a person's life, and examine how they are all connected. This theory can be used to illustrate the importance of looking at all aspects of a person, rather than just one feature (i.e. homelessness). It also urges people to examine how these aspects fit together in the broader society. To help library workers better support those experiencing homelessness, there are a variety of training options and resources available. For example, Ryan J. Dowd, author of *The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: An Empathy-Driven Approach to Solving Problems, Preventing Conflict, and Serving Everyone*, offers trainings around the world on how to use empathy-driven enforcement with those experiencing homelessness.

Researcher Sherry R. Arnstein, developed a classification framework to analyze citizen participation. The framework developed by Arnstein is visually depicted like an eight-rung ladder, with each rung being a level of participation, or rather, "the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product" (p. 217). The bottom two rungs of the ladder (*manipulation* and *therapy*) depict "non-participation." These levels intend to allow powerholders to "educate" and "cure" members, rather than to allow members to take part in organizing or managing programs. Going up the ladder, the next two rungs (*informing* and *consultation*), are at the level of "tokenism." At this level, underserved populations, what Arnstein refers to as the "have nots," are able to have a voice and be heard. Of this level, Arnstein says, "there is no follow through, no "muscle," hence no assurance of changing the status quo" (p. 217). Rung number five is *placation*, and is still in the level of "tokenism," although a higher version of it. Here,

underserved members of the community can act as advisors, but powerholders still have the final say. The next level is "degree of citizen power," and as one goes up the ladder, these degrees of power increase. Rung six (*partnership*), empowers members to debate, make deals, and engage with powerholders. The top two rungs (*delegated power* and *citizen control*) are reached when these underserved populations have the majority or the full organizational power. According to Arnstein, being able to recognize these different levels of participation makes it possible to understand the "increasingly strident demands for participation from the have-nots as well as the gamut of confusing responses from the powerholders" (p. 217). What makes the ladder framework so functional, is its ability to be used in various situations by all different groups, including libraries who serve those experiencing homelessness.

Libraries around the globe strive to transform the world through literacy by guaranteeing people from all backgrounds have access to the information they need. The ALA's Code of Ethics calls for library workers to, "provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests." By building information literacy skills and by providing access to information sources, libraries strengthen communities and help members within those communities thrive. Libraries aim to create a socially just, civically engaged, information literate, society. Libraries are also seen as a place of refuge or for some, a safe haven. Libraries are one of the few places where a person can go and use all of the resources and participate in events at no charge. For this reason, libraries play a key role in supporting people who are experiencing homelessness.

When thinking about libraries working to help members within communities thrive, the Ladder of Participation Framework can be applied. Library workers assist individuals from all

walks of life, including those who are experiencing homelessness. Through varied means, library workers can help community members, specifically individuals who are experiencing homelessness, climb the rungs of Arnstein's ladder. Helping to find open space in shelters and locations serving free food, applying for government aid, navigating the healthcare system, organizing food and clothing drives, hosting support events, offering programming, helping to find and apply for a job, and creating a resume are just a few of the actions libraries routinely take in assisting individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Through actions such as these, libraries can build community trust, foster intellectual growth, and connect with this underserved population. Individuals who are experiencing homelessness can use libraries as a stepping stone in climbing the Ladder of Participation.

A significant number of those experiencing homelessness are library users. This population consists of people from all backgrounds who each face unique challenges. Because community engagement work and the work of libraries are so interconnected, using theories and frameworks from this field to address this issue makes logical sense. Bringing the work of Putnam, Chavis and McMillan, Bronfenbrenner, and Arnstein together allows for libraries to determine how to best serve this diverse, and often underserved, population.

Conclusion

A community is more than just a city or a neighborhood. A community is any group of people with shared interests, values, or customs who come together to meet corresponding needs. Libraries help to build immersed, thriving communities by connecting individuals, fostering the intellectual development of community members, and advocating for civic and social engagement. The intersection between community engagement work and librarianship is

unambiguous. The melding of these two fields shows what a dynamic academic or public library can do for the greater good of communities as a whole.

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