

**Participation, People, and Place:**  
the role of public libraries in fostering  
connection and cultural capital in  
disadvantaged communities

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## **Abstract**

A cultural divide has been acknowledged in the UK, with people from disadvantaged (e.g., employment, education) communities least likely to participate in cultural activities. This research investigates the public library role in addressing issues of cultural divide by enabling and encouraging cultural engagement through group activity, using a qualitative approach encompassing participant observation and semi structured interviews with 42 participants, across 9 libraries (<25% SIMD) and 6 activities (knitting, walking, bounce and rhyme, adult literacy and numeracy, creative writing, and book groups).

This research evidences the drivers and barriers to cultural participation, meanings and motivations associated with group activity, and the sociocultural role of libraries in disadvantaged communities. The holistic impact of library groups is qualitatively demonstrated via shared participant perceptions of participation as purposeful and meaningful, providing social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing benefits. Animating libraries through group activity sparked and sustained participation, stimulated and supported social connection, cultural development, and the sharing of information amongst participants. In demonstrating the interplay between participation, people, and place, this research provides the first empirical evidence in the library context of the ability of group activity to generate cultural and social capital, provide a third place to enjoy culture and connection and information grounds for cultural information. Qualitative insight is provided of how this increases the relevance and personal importance of libraries and a catalyst to perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries.

In evidencing the holistic impact of library groups to issues of cultural divide and social inclusion, unrecognised within policy and practice, this research contributes to governmental and professional efforts to better understand and advocate the impact of cultural engagement. Illuminating the need for changes to professional practice which could increase the accessibility, awareness, and appeal of library services, by providing and promoting libraries as places for participation.



# Chapter 1

# Introduction

**1.1** [Aims and Objectives](#)

**1.2** [Research Questions](#)

**1.3** [Research Context](#)

**1.4** [Theoretical Framework](#)

**1.5** [Empirical Research](#)

**1.6** [Thesis Structure](#)

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and Objectives

This research sought to better understand the public library role in enabling and encouraging cultural engagement, by qualitatively exploring in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow: the drivers and barriers to cultural participation, the meanings and motivations associated with participatory group activity, and the social and cultural role of public libraries. To investigate this topic, theories of cultural and social capital in conjunction with theories of information behaviour, were applied as a lens through which to view the ability of public library group activity to bridge the cultural divide and support social inclusion in disadvantaged communities. To date there has been limited empirical application of these concepts, in combination, in the library context. This study sought to address this gap by utilising the theoretical framework to provide a basis from which to generate empirically informed insight of the importance of the provision of regular group activity in connecting communities with culture and how this can extend the reach and the relevance of public libraries. The researcher anticipated that the research findings generated from this study, by contributing both to the existing evidence base in other disciplines and aiding the development of theory, would help inform appropriate intervention points and generating mechanisms to stimulate cultural engagement and tackle cultural disengagement both in the library context and beyond.

## 1.2 Research Questions

This study investigated three questions:

**Question 1:** What are the key drivers and barriers to cultural participation within areas of multiple deprivations and which public library activities and resources could be best utilised to address issues of cultural divide?

**Question 2:** What is the public library role in stimulating and strengthening social connection amongst individuals, groups, and communities? Does this provide a third route to the development of cultural capital?

**Question 3:** What constitutes 'engagement' in the cultural context? What is the public library role in encouraging and enabling cultural engagement within areas of multiple

deprivations, how can this be evidenced and used to demonstrate impact and advocate value?

### 1.3 Research Context

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 enjoy cultural information, 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 & Kim, 2009; Leadbetter & O’Connor, 2013; Carnegie UK Trust 2014a, 2014b), social cohesion (Jeannotte, 2003), and neighbourhood 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 disadvantaged (e.g., employment, education) communities reported to be least likely to participate in cultural activities. Through the provision of a wide range of practical, educational, cultural and leisure services, public libraries can offer those most affected by digital, social, and cultural divides, a vital ‘route...to enter and engage with the community and wider society’ (Johnson, 2010, p.148), and can serve as ‘sites for the production, dissemination and appropriation of cultural capital’. (Goulding, 2008, p.236).

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). 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. Goulding (2008, p.237) has suggested, 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’ to their cultural role within communities. Further Rasmussen (2016,

p.549) has argued that offering opportunities for cultural participation could both aid the development of cultural capital and provide 'the obvious answer' to contemporary 'challenges' of the continued relevance of physical libraries in the digital age.

Theories of information behaviour can aid understanding of how disadvantaged communities perceive library services, why they may not participate in library activities and what changes libraries need to make to extend their reach into those communities. For public libraries theories of information behaviour, particularly those which consider socio-cultural context, can help inform the development of socially inclusive library services. The concept of 'information grounds'- social settings for serendipitous information sharing during social interactions, provides a tool by which public libraries can better understand and advocate the qualitative impact of cultural services and activities which involve social engagement and interactions. At present interactive library activities such as book groups and story times are evaluated in quantitative terms by the number of participants involved. However, there is a growing appreciation within Library and Information Science (LIS) that 'these output and performance measures... do not shed enough light on the value of the library to the user and the impact on his or her life' (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013, p.169). When viewed through the lens of information ground theory, an enhanced understanding of how public libraries can transform, enrich, and empower disadvantaged individuals and communities by offering opportunities for cultural participation which encourage and enable communication, connection, and cohesion could be achieved.

## 1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study utilised theories of cultural capital and information behaviour to investigate issues of cultural divide. The combination of complementary theories, which highlight the various internal and external factors which shape the behaviour of individuals and communities, generated empirically informed depth of insight in the library context of the barriers to and benefits of cultural engagement amongst disadvantaged groups.

### Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital was developed by Pierre Bourdieu to explain the ways in which the education system reproduces rather than alleviates inequality by recognising and

rewarding the cultural tastes and interests of the middle and upper classes. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is acquired in two ways: in the home (domestically) and at school (scholastically) and consists of three expressions: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital can be understood as the 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' towards a desire for cultivation and self-improvement (Bourdieu 1986, p.106-107) reflected in an orientation towards participation in cultural activities and efforts to develop cultural knowledge. Objectified cultural capital is commonly understood as a familiarity with and ability to appropriate both financially and intellectually (Bourdieu 1986, p.109) objects of cultural significance such as books and paintings. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to the possession of educational qualifications which act as 'a certificate of cultural competence' (Bourdieu 1986, p.109-110), which provide a broader 'trademark' of cultivation and accomplishment. (Bourdieu 1984, p.58). An example of how the three expressions work together in a typical library scenario has been evidenced by Sullivan (2001) who found that pupils using the school library and borrowing books, built cultural knowledge and linguistic skill which helped them to gain educational qualifications.

Cultural capital, which for Bourdieu formed 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 (1984, p.468–69) 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'. Essentially for Bourdieu, our tastes—whether we like 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 as 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, p.235).

Contemporary realities of social and cultural stratification are characterized by cultural behaviours as opposed to taste preferences (Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal, &

Wright, 2009). Issues of cultural divide can be understood in terms of cultural participation levels that serve as a contemporary 'public manifestation of social boundaries' (Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.169) with the line being drawn between those who participate and those who do not (Bennett et al., 2009). Social research in the United Kingdom has found that the 'wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse' are 'the most culturally active' (Warwick Commission, 2015, p.33). Bourdieu (1999, p.127-28) 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'. 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, p.473). 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).

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 culture is a game that favours 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. 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 & Cocker, 2008), which endeavours to encourage both appreciation for and empathy toward diverse forms of culture (Jones, 1998). By improving access to and the accessibility of diverse cultural forms, public libraries bring culture into the everyday lives of individuals which can remove varied barriers (e.g., education, encouragement, environment) to building cultural capital.

### Information Behaviour

Theories of information behaviour which have foregrounded the socio-cultural context within which information is understood, created, and utilised have evidenced 'that information

cannot be easily separated from the practices, meanings, and actions that shape social activity' (Case, 2016, p.56). Research, theoretical and empirical, focusing on everyday information behaviour has generated invaluable insight into the realities of how information is used by individuals, groups and communities to sustain and constrain day to day life.

Pivotal within Library and Information Science (LIS) to improving understanding of the information behaviour of disadvantaged groups, has been the work of Elfreda Chatman who has shined a light on the social factors which shape the boundaries, define the barriers, and limit the benefit of information flow to those most in need. Chatman believed that her theories of 'information poverty', 'life in the round' and 'normative behaviour' could be utilised by the library profession to better understand those communities within which they are based, enabling libraries to engage and enrich those traditionally hardest to reach. Complementing Chatman's research is the work of Reijo Savolainen, who has addressed how issues of cognitive/cultural competencies and the socio-cultural context which determines their development and perceived value, serve as mutually reinforcing barriers to the practice of everyday social and cultural participation, such as library use. Of particular interest to this study is the work of Karen Fisher, who by focusing on the social context of information sharing, identified that 'information grounds' develop in places where social interaction and connection 'fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information' (Pettigrew, 1999, p.811). Fisher demonstrated the importance of place, interaction, and connection in group activities to enabling both formal and informal information sharing, facilitating wider social interaction, and building a sense of community. With information ground research evidencing the significance of public libraries as places for participation and connection in this process (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007).

## 1.5 Empirical Research

In response to identified gaps in the literature, the empirical component of this study explored the significance cultural practices, objects and places play in the everyday lives of library users to better understand the nature of cultural engagement in areas of multiple deprivations. In this study cultural capital was understood as something that all people can have, can be independently developed outwith the home and school, an everyday resource for empowerment rather than just an exclusive source of power (Pugh, 2011) and generated

via diverse cultural tastes, abilities, knowledge, participation, and engagement. Cultural consumption, the private use of cultural objects which symbolise wider cultural tastes and preferences, and cultural participation, including both involvement in cultural activities and attendance at cultural places or events, have traditionally been regarded as constituting cultural capital. This study focused on cultural engagement, understood as sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by, as cultural practices which are 'identity building' resonated with Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and its foundational role in the appropriation of objectified and institutionalised cultural capital. This study explored the ability of public libraries to facilitate the embodiment of culture, by going beyond offering opportunities to consume or participate in culture to enable engagement in the cultural context which is both 'purposive' and 'meaningful' (Susain, 2016), via the provision of sustained group activity.

A qualitative approach, incorporating participant observation and semi-structured interviews, was utilised to explore the motivations and meanings associated with library group engagement as qualitative research is best suited to capturing 'the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and social processes in the particular contexts which they occur' (Jupp, 2006, p.249). Both methods aided the data collection process by providing multiple opportunities for interaction with library group participants, enabling the researcher to develop a rapport, build trust and acceptance and better understand the groups from the perspective of participants. The researcher adopted a multi-site approach utilising the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to identify libraries in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow, focusing on those located in the 25% most deprived data zones (<25%). Incorporating nine libraries aided the inclusion of diverse library groups (walking, knitting, adult literacy & numeracy, bounce & rhyme, creative writing and book groups) and public library users (broad representation of age, gender, ethnicity, education, employment status). Through presentation and discussion of the findings of this fieldwork, empirically informed depth of insight is provided of the varying ways in which public libraries address issues of cultural divide by stimulating cultural engagement within disadvantaged communities.



## 1.6 Glossary

This study utilised a range of key terms, in combination and isolation, to facilitate an inclusive understanding of interwoven issues of culture and inequality focused on:

- why/why not (capital, capacity, competencies, development, divide)
- where/where not (hubs, context, deprived, disadvantaged)
- how/how much (consumption, participation, engagement)

Key terms were understood by the researcher as follows:

<b>Culture</b>	Intellectual and aesthetic works and practices representative of both shared and diverse ways of life, which have the power to enrich and enlighten through broadening horizons and building knowledge.
<b>Cultural Capital</b>	Cultural competencies that facilitate cultural participation and symbolize cultural capacity and authority
<b>Cultural Engagement</b>	Sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by
<b>Cultural Participation</b>	Involvement in cultural activities and attendance at cultural places or events
<b>Cultural Consumption</b>	The private use of cultural objects which symbolise wider cultural tastes and preferences
<b>Cultural Divide</b>	A difference in cultural behaviours (e.g., consumption and participation patterns) influenced by factors such as class, education, ethnicity, employment etc which act as a barrier
<b>Cultural Context</b>	Environment which reflects and influences cultural behaviours, attitudes, and values
<b>Cultural Hub</b>	A centre for cultural activity within communities
<b>Cultural Competencies</b>	Knowledge, skills, education, and behaviours which encourage and enable the appropriation of cultural products and activities
<b>Cultural Capacity</b>	Ability to appropriate and appreciate cultural products and activities
<b>Cultural Development</b>	Expanded ability to appropriate and appreciate cultural products and activities enabled by engagement with culture
<b>Multiple Deprivations</b>	Geographical areas where various types of deprivations are prevalent such as low levels of education, high crime rates, poor health and high levels of unemployment
<b>Disadvantaged Communities</b>	Communities experiencing multiple deprivations adversely affected by a lack of access to resources and opportunities
<b>Social Capital</b>	Encompasses both the connections that unite people and the benefits derived from social relationships

Figure 1: Glossary of Key Terms

## 1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The introduction begins by outlining the aims and objectives and the research questions of this study, followed by an overview of the research context and theoretical framework and how these shaped the methodological approach. A glossary of key terms is provided.

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature review chapter begins with an introduction (2.1), followed by a section focusing on the traditional and contemporary role of public libraries and the challenges and opportunities these present for addressing issues of cultural divide in areas of multiple deprivation (2.2). Next the chapter identifies theories of information behaviour from the work of Fisher, Chatman and Savolainen which foreground the socio-cultural context within which information is understood and utilised and the significance of this to how disadvantaged communities perceive library services, why they may not engage and what changes public libraries need to make to extend their reach into these communities. (2.3). Finally, an overview is provided of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital in relation to both educational and social inequality, the relevance of the concept to public libraries and existing application of Bourdieu's theoretical oeuvre in Library and Information Science (2.4). The section concludes by summarising identified gaps in the literature and implications of these for further research (2.5)

- **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The methodology chapter begins with an introduction (3.1), then outlines the methodological considerations which influenced the researcher's approach, strategy, design and methods selection (3.2), details the criteria used to identify a research environment for fieldwork and how methods were applied to collect data (3.3), the ethical process followed (3.4), and how collected data was analysed to identify themes (3.5). Finally, a summary is presented of the empirical component and direction for presentation of key findings (3.6)

- **Chapter 4: Findings**

The findings chapter begins with an introduction (4.1), followed by contextual participant observation data for each of the six types of library group (4.2). Next participant interview responses are then presented by question, within each question answer participant

responses are grouped thematically in order of frequency (4.3). Next participant quantitative and qualitative responses to a survey component, included in the interview, exploring wider cultural participation habits beyond the library are presented (4.4). To conclude key findings from each method are presented and themes for discussion (4.5).

- **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The discussion chapter begins with an introduction (5.1) and comprises three key sections: library groups, library role and implications for theory arranged hierarchically. First discussion of empirical data individually in relation to a specific library group, providing depth of insight in the library context of six different types of group activity: knitting, walking, adult literacy and numeracy, bounce and rhyme, creative writing, and reading (5.2). Next building on this, shared experiences, motivations, meanings across the six groups are discussed collectively providing empirical evidence of the social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing role of public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations (5.3). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the four identified roles in relation to the theoretical framework of this study, empirically evidencing the library role in generating both cultural and social capital and functioning as both third place and information ground (5.4). To conclude an overview is presented of each area discussed (5.5).

- **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The conclusion chapter begins by specifically answering each of the three research questions, previously addressed thematically in the literature review, findings, and discussion chapters (6.1). Followed by study limitations (6.2), recommendations for further research (6.3), reflection on the research journey and subsequent impact on professional practice (6.4), and implications for policy and practice (6.5).

# Chapter 2

# Literature

# Review

- 2.1**    [Introduction](#)
- 2.2**    [Public Libraries](#)
- 2.3**    [Information Behaviour](#)
- 2.4**    [Cultural Capital](#)
- 2.5**    [Conclusion](#)

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

To investigate the public library role in addressing issues of cultural divide by enabling and encouraging cultural engagement, empirical and theoretical literature was sought in three areas: public libraries, information behaviour and cultural capital. The researcher began by exploring the cultural role of public libraries, believing that an improved understanding of both traditional and contemporary aspects of public library practice would provide a strong contextual foundation. Literature was identified which provided insight into the origins and purpose of public library provision, current practice, and the challenges and opportunities facing public libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2.2). Next to explore issues of cultural divide, a theoretical framework comprising theories of information behaviour and cultural capital was selected. The researcher believed that the combination of complementary theories, which highlight the various internal and external factors which shape the behaviour of individuals and communities, would generate unique insight into the barriers to and benefits of cultural engagement amongst disadvantaged groups. Firstly, the researcher identified theories of information behaviour which foregrounded the socio-cultural context within which information is understood and utilised, to better understand how disadvantaged communities can perceive library services, why they may not engage and what changes public libraries need to make to extend their reach into these communities (2.3). Next to better understand the links between culture and inequality, the researcher explored the origin and evolution of theories of cultural capital, believing that a focus on existing evidence in relation to educational and social inequality, could reveal a resonance of the concept with the purpose and practice of public libraries (2.4).

### **2.2 Public Libraries**

#### **2.2.1 Traditional role**

##### ***2.2.1.1 Origins of public library creation***

Whilst there existed numerous academic, technical, private, circulating and subscription libraries in the UK before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the origins of the public library service can be traced to the passing of the Public Libraries Act in 1850 which provided a mandate for libraries to be publicly funded via a small, levied rate of taxation. The successful adoption of

this act was testament to the ability of the proponents of public libraries to ‘gain political support for their fundamental proposition that libraries were a socially desirable good’ (Baker & Evans, 2011, p.71). This argument, which advocated the intrinsic value of public libraries, was successful for two reasons. Firstly, it correlated with prevalent enlightenment ideas regarding the power of cultural activities as means of advancement and self-improvement (McMenemy, 2009) and secondly the proposal to create public libraries came at a time when there was a perceived need to provide the new urban based working classes with morally appropriate opportunities for low-cost leisure.

#### *2.2.1.2 The purpose of public libraries- education, recreation, or leisure?*

The rationale for the widespread introduction of public libraries into communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was ‘built upon the ideas of democracy, enlightenment and cultural welfare’ (Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 2003, p.84). The later idea of there being a standard of cultural welfare, was linked to the belief that through the provision of services such as public libraries the working classes would have the opportunity to ‘use their leisure time in culturally beneficial ways’ (McMenemy, 2009, p.5). This reflected the assumption of the existence of a ‘hierarchy of leisure activity’ (Snape, 1995, p.7) which placed traditional working class leisure pursuits at the bottom. As a result, it is important to consider the extent to which public libraries were influenced by the ideological climate they originated within and the extent to which ‘What leisure is and what it is for are thus, above all, cultural constructs’ (Meller, as cited in Kinnell & Sturges, 1996, p.1).

The term leisure, then as now, implied connotations of a frivolous use of free time with enjoyment and relaxation being the chief objectives. However, proponents of public library services argued that they would provide a key and unique opportunity for the working classes to move beyond leisure towards recreation, a more positive use of free time associated with the ‘virtues of self-improvement and utility...undertaken for the sake of the subsequent power which it generates and the subsequent profit which it ensures’ (Snape 1995, p.8). In this context it was proposed that through the educational role of public libraries, a focus on ‘rational recreation’ could be used as a tool in ‘educating the working classes in the merits of living decently’ (Meller, as cited in Kinnell & Sturges, 1996, p.6). These arguments were underpinned by wider held utilitarian beliefs of the ‘utility of life’s

higher pleasures, which included the pursuit of useful knowledge and education’ (Black, Pepper & Bagshaw 2009, p.30).

### 2.2.1.3 *The great fiction question*

Whilst the rationale for the creation of publicly funded libraries was rooted in enlightenment ideals of improvement and enrichment, the reality of how best to achieve these aims via library services and collections soon became a source of controversy. The chief source, commonly referred to as ‘the great fiction question’, concerned whether public libraries should ‘provide fiction and, if so, what type and standard of fiction’ (Snape, 1995, p.4). Many librarians, politicians and prominent community members were concerned with the unexpected popularity of fiction, particularly amongst the working classes, seeing limited educational benefit to be derived from reading works of low literary value. Early attempts by the library profession to dissuade the public from fiction reading by methods such as limiting collections to literary as opposed to popular fiction and disproportionately higher spending on non-fiction collections, proved unsuccessful with fiction consistently representing the majority of books issues (Kinnell & Sturges, 1996). As a result, in the face of the overwhelming popularity of fiction collections in public libraries, the question of whether fiction should be provided had been definitively answered in the affirmative, however questions regarding the quality of fiction which should be provided remained.

With public libraries playing a unique role in both the education and recreation of people from all classes prior to the first world war, the distinctions made between ‘high’ and ‘low’ quality fiction can be appreciated as displaying a ‘deeper cultural significance’ (Snape, 1995, p.5). With reading tastes and preferences ‘following class lines’ (Snape, 1995, p.30), the focus of collection development policies which sought ‘to provide for an idealized reader preferably a scholar or adult learner, rather than the actual schoolchild, fiction reader’ was in line with ‘orthodox views of the value or rather lack of value, of fiction’ (Kinnell & Sturges, 1996, p.44). This is significant as ‘disputes over library materials are often oblique references to who the library is (or should be) for’ (Frederiksen, 2015, p.148). As a result, it could be argued that the origins of the working class ‘perception that libraries are ‘not for the likes of us’’ (Goulding, 2006, p.225) can be traced back to foundational professional

value judgements which explicitly privileged and legitimized the tastes of the upper classes over those of the working classes.

Whilst from a contemporary perspective it is hard to imagine a public library service without fiction collections and a deep-rooted belief in the power of reading for pleasure, the 'great fiction question' can still be appreciated today. The issue of 'whether it is desirable for public funds to pay for people to read for leisure, or whether we should have more lofty ideals for our publicly funded libraries' (McMenemy, 2009, p.62) is one which is still prevalent in modern discussions of public library provision, particularly during times of economic difficulty. As is the issue regarding the quality of fiction which should be available in public libraries. Samuel Rothstein, a foundational figure in the Library and Information Science Literature argued that a key value of librarianship should be a commitment to 'enlarging the horizons and elevating the taste of the community' (Rothstein 1967, as cited in Gorman, 2015, p.29), echoing the sentiments more than a century earlier of 'the early campaigners for public libraries, who were 'consciously seeking to shape the taste and habits of the working class'' (Snape, 1995, p.10)

#### *2.2.1.4 A 'golden age' for public libraries?*

It is often easy to look back with rose tinted glasses to a time when things were perceived to be simpler. In reviewing the long history of public libraries in the UK, the idea of a golden age prior to the various contemporary challenges posed by technological, ideological, and economic pressures is one held within many public library historical narratives. However, historians out with the library profession have argued for the 'need to conceptualize the Victorian and Edwardian public library (at least) as a scene of tension and retreat from hagiography of its pioneers and Whiggish interpretations of some of its historic developments' (Peatling, 2003, p.133). By viewing the foundational phase of public libraries in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the unbiased lens of library 'outsiders' as opposed to 'insiders', a richer picture of the realities of 'the purpose and practice of public librarianship' (Black et al, 2009, p.37) during this period can be achieved.

When the first public libraries opened to the public there existed no set standard for employment of library staff. The prerequisite qualities possessed by early public librarians



were predominantly that they be male, respectable, and preferably a bibliophile. As a result, the early development of public libraries was largely a result of trial and error with varying degrees of style and success (Kinnell & Sturges, 1996). It could be argued that the founding fathers of public librarianship developed an approach to library provision which was both 'patriarchal' (Hammond, 2002) and 'parochial' (Black et al, 2009), evidenced by the creation of gender and class-based hierarchies of desirable library patrons, stock and services which provided a mirror image of both the male middle class dominated library profession and their powerful supporters. This approach by the library profession highlights the extent to which 'even well-intentioned people are capable of acting as the checkpoint guards of existing barriers of privilege and inequality and even of exploiting that position for their own benefit' (Peatling, 2003, p.137)

How well-intentioned were the objectives of those involved in both the creation and management of public libraries in their foundational period? Snape (1995, pp 3-10) has argued that 'the early campaigners for public libraries...were in fact attempting to achieve a degree of social control' which public library staff were then subsequently complicit with, given the more prestigious light with which an association with recreation as opposed to leisure would illuminate the library profession. This argument is supported by Black et al (2009, p.49-50) who acknowledges that whilst the view that public libraries were engaged in a process of social control should not be 'exaggerated' it also cannot be 'ignored', given the extent to which public libraries propagated 'establishment/'acceptable' forms of cultural production', resulting in other forms of culture being 'overshadowed'. Therefore, rather than a golden age when viewed from the perspective of the working classes, the early history of the public library service in the UK highlights the extent to which in many cases it 'ended up militating against large sections of the population whom it had been intended to serve' (Hammond, 2002, p.84).

## 2.2.2      Contemporary role

### 2.2.2.1      *A modern mission*

In an independent review of the public library service Greenhalgh, Landry & Worpole (1995, p.6) argued that 'The library is not only a powerful symbol of the past, but also a potential beacon... for the future'. Public libraries have endeavoured to realise this potential via a

strategic alignment of the aims and objectives of libraries with those of the governments' social inclusion agenda. This resulted in the development of a 'modern mission within the information society' (McMenemy, 2009, p.3) for the public library service which incorporates traditional enlightenment ideals but also recognises the cultural, educational, technological, economic, and social dimensions of the library role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Carnegie UK Trust, 2014b). To achieve this, libraries have adapted and evolved, undergoing dramatic changes in terms of design, services, and atmosphere to become part of the fabric of everyday life within both affluent and disadvantaged communities.

#### 2.2.2.2 *Community role*

Public libraries provide social, cultural, educational, and economic hubs which are at 'the center of community life' and 'go beyond the provision of traditional services, to be community builders and places where people get involved' (Zurinski, Osborne, Anthonie-Ney & McKenny, 2013, p.71). This can be evidenced in the transition from library led outreach programmes to a focus on a more collaborative process of community engagement. Sung, Hepworth & Ragsdell (2012, p.211) argue that community engagement projects should 'inform', 'consult', 'involve' and 'empower' communities resulting in projects which both 'stem from' and 'belong to' local communities. By actively engaging with communities as opposed to developing programs and services in response to their 'externally perceived needs' (Overall, 2009), a 'shift from libraries...based in communities to community-based libraries' has been enabled resulting in the development in many cases of 'a positive and dynamic relationship between the library and the local community' (Pateman & Vincent 2010 as cited in Sung et al., 2012, p.215)

Contemporary public libraries have an important multipurpose role as both 'place and space' (Oliphant, 2014, p.358) within communities. A 'valued aspect' is the 'neutral community space' (Carnegie UK Trust, 2012, p.55) libraries offer with no inherent access requirements or obligations where individuals and groups can relax and socialise providing a 'route for individuals, including those who experience deep isolation, to enter and engage with the community and wider society' (Johnson 2010, p.148). Further Barclay (2017, p.271) argues that the 'Library space makes it possible for people to learn, socialize, escape, and connect in ways that no other present-day space—private, governmental, or commercial—can.' This is aided by the range of structured, practical, educational, cultural and leisure

services available in libraries, with events and group activities found to act a ‘catalyst’ to socialisation amongst library users (Miller, 2014, p.323). For example, as both social and creative places many libraries now offer a range of participatory opportunities to make and meet such as knitting groups which have been evidenced as appealing to existing library users actively seeking opportunities for socialisation (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007). Whilst Evjen & Audunson (2009, p.172) have evidenced the ‘potential’ of public libraries to attract new users by providing ‘high intensive meeting places’ which connect people in the cultural context. Further traditional core services such as support for preschool child development, valued and well used by some parents, have been enhanced by offering fun and welcoming interactive opportunities for young children to learn, play and socialise, with the sociable environment found to encourage participation (Clark, 2017).

### *2.2.2.3 Reader Development*

Public libraries have a well-established cultural role in encouraging and enabling reading within communities. Extending beyond the traditional loaning of books, contemporary public libraries now offer a range of inclusive resources such as audio and e-books, in addition to author events, seasonal reading schemes and an interactive presence on social media to promote and support reading as both a solitary and shared activity. Reading is a cultural activity which encourages ‘social engagement’ and ‘personal development’ in individuals with Howard (2011, p.47) finding that ‘committed readers are three times more likely than non-readers to visit museums, attend plays or concerts, or create artworks of their own’. Whilst the contemporary public library offers much more than just books, the facilitation of reading via reader development programs remains a core function. Reader Development is a form of ‘active intervention’ which aims to enable readers to get the best possible experience from the act of reading- targeting both ‘those who lack the skills to find reading enjoyable, as well as the apparently confident reader who may be limiting their enjoyment through lack of confidence’ (Branching Out, 1995). Reader Development programs empower readers by giving them the chance to discover, demystify and discuss books. For example, book groups have long been a core offering of most public library services, providing a mechanism of both connecting readers with new titles, with the library service and others in the local community.

#### 2.2.2.4 *Learning & Literacy*

Learning and literacy are as integral to the public library service in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as they were foundational in the 19<sup>th</sup>. However, during this period the educational role of public libraries has shifted in focus from the enlightenment alignment of libraries with scholarly learning, to a modern emphasis on facilitating both formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities. This is recognised in the first national strategy for public libraries in Scotland *Ambition and Opportunity* (Scottish Library & Information Council, 2015, p.17) which argues that public libraries have a 'unique and distinct role' in enabling the learning of 'people of all ages' which is 'complimentary' to that of the education sector. Lifelong learning is defined (European Commission 2003a as cited in Eve, de Groot & Schmidt, 2007, p.394) as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/ or employment related perspective'. Gorman (2015, p.40) argues that 'Through lifelong learning, libraries can and do change lives' by offering community-based learning opportunities for all ages- from bounce and rhyme sessions for babies, to homework clubs for teenagers, to language courses for adults to ICT classes for silver surfers.

The 'grey area between the provision of informal and formal' (Ashcroft, Farrow & Watts, 2007, p.136) learning within libraries has sparked debate as to whether public libraries are 'part of the learning landscape or competing as an alternative leisure activity' (Eve et al, 2007, p.404), however the ethos of lifelong learning incorporates both these opposing roles, acknowledging the extent to which they can be mutually beneficial and reinforcing. At the core of lifelong learning lies the development of literacy in all forms. A particular success story has been the ability of the public library service, 'reinvigorated' by the introduction of new technologies (Goulding, 2006, p.170), to use these as a 'catalyst' (Eve et al., 2007, p.397) to position libraries on the frontline of community based digital literacy initiatives. Through the provision of introductory ICT courses public libraries have been able to reach those 'on the wrong side of the digital divide' (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals, 2014, p.1), by providing safe non-threatening spaces within communities for people to develop their digital literacy skills.

#### 2.2.2.5 *ICT Provision*

The People's Network program, which at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century facilitated the widespread introduction of ICT facilities into public libraries across the UK, marked 'a turning point for public libraries' (Brophy, 2003, p.1 as cited in Goulding, 2006, p.169). The government driven project reflected the labour governments belief that 'Just as in the past books were a chance for ordinary people to better themselves, in the future online education will be a route to better prospects. But just as books are available from public libraries, the benefits of the superhighway must be there for everyone' (Tony Blair, 1996 as cited in Muddiman, Durrani, Dutch, Linley, Pateman & Vincent, 2000). The success of the project in benefiting disadvantaged communities and attracting new users had a 'positive impact on the image and culture of the public library service' (Goulding, 2006, p.169), significantly raising the profile and relevance of public libraries both politically and within communities.

The introduction of internet enabled desktop computers and the provision of training in their use marked the first stage of library solutions to addressing the digital divide. The next stage is the provision of free WIFI within all public libraries, this is vital as 'wifi access, adoption and use can serve as the next great levellers in the race to reduce the digital divide' (Middleton & Chambers, 2010, p.16). With the introduction of smart phones, the cost of purchasing the hardware necessary to access the internet is much less prohibitive than a decade ago. However, many people still struggle to afford the monthly costs of providing internet access within the home, with others living in rural areas affected by poor internet availability in their areas. Many people, particularly younger generations, are accustomed to the easy accessibility of Wi-Fi in further/higher education, on public transport and in cafés and shops. As a result, to ensure that libraries continue to build on early successes in relation to digital inclusion, the provision of Wi-Fi should be available in all UK public libraries. In Scotland 96% of libraries provide Wi-Fi (SLIC, 2016), with cities such as Glasgow providing Wi-Fi in all library branches.

## 2.2.3 Challenges and opportunities

### *2.2.3.1 Introduction*

Public libraries ‘connect communities and change lives’ by serving as social, cultural, economic and educational hubs (Carnegie UK Trust, 2014b) which offer an extensive and diverse range of services. As a result of this broad appeal public libraries ‘compared with some other types of cultural activity, can reach a much broader range of age groups, genders, and ethnic and social backgrounds’ (Rankin & Brock, 2012, p.5). However, over the last decade there has been a decline in both library use and funding, and whilst it could be argued that there is a correlation, it is also important to recognise the wider societal and technological changes which have had a major impact on the popularity of public libraries. Whilst these challenges have not resulted in the obsolescence of public libraries by 2020 as predicted (Coates Report, 2004 as cited in Goulding, 2006, p.3), the ability of libraries to be of continued relevance will necessitate utilising both tested and innovative means of reaching new and retaining existing users, in addition to demonstrating and advocating their continuing value.

### *2.2.3.2 The ‘essence of inclusion’?*

The rise of New Labour at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, heralded a changing political landscape dominated by a marked shift in social policy agenda with a key objective of the new government being a need to tackle the problem of social exclusion. Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept which ‘describes the phenomenon where particular people have no recognition, or voice, or stake in the society in which they live’ (Charity Commission, 2001, p.4). The many dimensions: ‘economic, social, political, neighbourhood, individual, spatial and group’ (Hicken, 2004, p.45 as cited in Birdi et al., 2008, p.577) of social exclusion are often connected resulting in an ‘alienation from mainstream society’ and ‘the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life’ (Duffy, 1995, as cited in Birdi et al., 2008, p.577). A political shift in focus from pinpointing entrenched problems of exclusion to instead tackling broad and varied barriers to participation in society, represented a powerful shift in narrative from social exclusion to social inclusion. The power to deliver a socially inclusive society rested on a belief in the ‘social responsibility of {particularly publicly} funded services’ (Birdi et al., 2008, p.578) to facilitate the alleviation of the various multifaceted problems of exclusion to enable inclusion.

The history of the public library service in the UK represents a long-standing tradition of a politically mandated social, educational, and cultural role. As a result of this heritage and the large existing network of library buildings located within disadvantaged communities, it is unsurprising that public libraries were positioned 'front and centre as a facilitator of the government's social inclusion agenda' (McMenemy, 2009, p.50). However, to date the exact nature of this role 'has not always been clearly defined' (Train, Dalton & Elkin, 2000, p.483) which has resulted in a 'sporadic and uncertain' (Muddiman et al, 2000, p.22) approach to tackling social exclusion and promoting social inclusion by public library services. Key reports originating from within the library profession such as 'Libraries for all: social inclusion in public libraries' (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 1999) and 'Libraries: The Essence of Inclusion' (Muddiman et al, 2000) have corroborated this by evidencing the inconsistent and often conflicting successes and failings of various approaches.

Addressing social exclusion requires sensitive, empathetic and collaborative approaches towards disadvantaged and marginalised groups (Train et al., 2000; Birdi et al., 2008; Overall, 2009) by culturally competent public library staff able 'to understand the needs of diverse populations' (Overall, 2009, p.176). Socially inclusive public libraries broaden social networks (Spink & Cole, 2006) within communities by providing 'a route for individuals, including those who experience deep isolation, to enter and engage with the community and wider society' (Johnson, 2010, p.148). Through the provision of a broad range of cultural services and activities 'offering an intellectual and social element' (McMenemy, 2009, p.199) such as book groups, film clubs and maker spaces that involve social engagement and interactions, public libraries 'contribute to the public good' (Usherwood, 2007, p36) and the alleviation of social fragmentation (Birdi et al., 2008), helping to transform, enrich and empower socially marginalised individuals and communities (Goulding, 2004). However, the potential of the public libraries to tackle the social, digital, and cultural divides which lie at the root of social exclusion is one which has not yet been realised, despite a correlation between the broad remit of the public library service and the government's social inclusion agenda.

### 2.2.3.3 *Increasing reach, relevance, and importance*

Against a backdrop of declining book borrowing, budgets, and use, finding ways to extend the reach of public libraries is crucial. Library use can be a lifelong process for some, for others only at specific life stages and for some people not at all. Library use is positively and negatively influenced by a range of factors, with research identifying both who libraries are reaching and who they are not. For example, Oliphant (2014, p.351) found that library users in Canada were most likely to be employed, well educated, live locally, and include families with children and less likely to be unemployed, retired, or unable to work. In the US Sin & Vakarri (2015, p.212) corroborated this picture identifying gender and ethnicity as additional factors, with women and ethnic minorities found to be more likely to use libraries. However, in the UK, the picture is more complex with the Carnegie Trust (2017b, p.4) finding library use to be strong across the UK amongst 'prolific readers' and those with children at home, however varying across the home nations with regards to age, gender, employment and socio-economic status. The picture is particularly interesting in Scotland, where despite a sharp drop in library use across all demographics use still compares favourably with other parts of the UK, with those from the most deprived areas most likely to use the library frequently (Carnegie Trust, 2017c, p.6).

Despite lauded as a service which can appeal to users from the cradle to the grave, the above picture of library use suggests that whilst contemporary libraries are successfully appealing to families, they are failing to meet the needs of certain demographics. Sin & Vakarri (2015, p.217) suggest more 'relevant library resources and services' such as 'everyday activities and interests' for increasing library use amongst the elderly, with research evidencing both that retirement can motivate cultural participation (Miles, 2016; Goulding, 2018) and that the public are keen for libraries to offer additional participatory activities (Carnegie Trust, 2017a). Rasmussen (2016, p.549) argues that providing opportunities for participation provides 'the obvious answer' to contemporary 'challenges' surrounding the continued relevance of physical libraries in the digital age, with Svendsen (2013, p.61-63) demonstrating that the expansion of 'noncore activities' such as events and activities has 'transformed' public libraries. However, Goulding (2009, p.41) has evidenced 'misgivings' within the profession as to how comfortably the provision of certain activities sit alongside the traditional role of the library, and the potential alienation of existing users.



Whilst Hedemark (2017, p.121-122) has called for research which explores ‘the interplay between the limitations and possibilities of participation’ activities in public libraries, having found that ‘historical and institutional’ library practice can impact on contemporary participation.

A shift towards a more participatory cultural offer which extends beyond ‘collection’ to enable ‘connection’ (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016), could provide a mechanism of overcoming barriers to library use. Library programs and activities can address ‘institutional’, ‘perception and awareness’, ‘personal and social’ and ‘environmental’ barriers (Department of Culture, Media & Sport, 1999, p.12) by making libraries ‘more accessible to new groups of users’ (Varheim, Steinmo & Ide, 2008, p.889). A desire for socialisation can motivate participation in library activities (e.g., Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011) with activities used as a ‘tool for social facilitation’ (Shipman & McGrath, 2016, p.418). Regular interaction has been found to be important in ‘facilitating more and stronger social connections’ (Gong et al., 2008, p.74), benefitting wellbeing by encouraging the giving and receiving of ‘companionship, friendship, support, and advice’ and boosting ‘confidence’ (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011, p.308). Additionally, regular participation in activities has been found to build trust both with fellow participants and the library, by enabling those involved to gain experience and knowledge of the library, resources, and other participants (Varheim, 2014) with the ‘significance of... routines, activities and interactions’ bringing meaning to local everyday cultural participation (Miles & Gibson, 2016, p.152). Therefore, a focus on offering participatory activities, could address two contemporary issues- a decline in frequency of visits and a perception that libraries are important for communities, but not personally to individuals (Carnegie, 2017b)

#### *2.2.3.4 Shining a light on the true value and impact of public libraries*

Discussions and determinations of the value of public libraries are predominantly framed within an economic context, utilising quantitative data to evaluate and evidence the costs and benefits of the public funding of the library service. Gorman (2015, p.40) argues that the ‘the value of all libraries is sometimes obscured by the day-to-day minutiae of library use... they are not always understood and prized for what they are’. By defining the value of

public libraries solely by the quantifiable such as visitor numbers, opening hours, volume of stock borrowed etc, the qualitative contributions of libraries in areas as diverse as social inclusion, health and wellbeing, cultural welfare, social isolation, and community regeneration go unrecognised. Amongst library practitioners, LIS academics and library supporters there is a growing appreciation that 'these output and performance measures... do not shed enough light on the value of the library to the user and the impact on his or her life' (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013, p.169). A focus on impact and outcome, would provide a better tool with which to evidence and advocate the 'personal benefits' experienced by library users (Sin & Vakkari, 2015, p.210). This recognition of the need for the impact of libraries to be understood within a framework characterised by 'a return to values rather than value' (McMenemy, 2007, as cited in Halpin, Rankin, Chapman & Walker, 2015, p.33) is particularly appropriate within the current financial climate, which has prompted closer scrutiny of all publicly funded services (Rooney-Browne, 2009).

Whilst it could be argued that support for libraries is often more 'more latent than overt' (Gorman, 2015, p.53), public libraries in the UK are enjoying an unprecedented period of prominence in the media in response to the significant numbers of closures, reduced budgets and opening hours of both public libraries and school libraries which have proven unpopular with those who view libraries as a basic right (Ingham, 2015). High profile advocacy initiatives originating both from within and outwith the library sector, have sought to highlight the true social, cultural, educational, and economic value of public libraries to individuals, communities, and the country. Historically it has proven difficult to define specific indicators of community benefit produced by library services which are the necessary foundations upon which the evaluation of community impact should be based. Without systems in place which can capture the holistic benefits of the public library service, the continuing quantitative decline in visitors and issues not the qualitative experience and importance of these visits and issues, will be what dominates discussions of the value, relevance and ultimately the future of publicly funded libraries.

## 2.3 Information Behaviour

### 2.3.1 What is information behaviour?

#### *2.3.1.1 The origins of information behaviour*

The study of information behaviour which originated within the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, represented a marked shift in LIS away from the traditional study of the efficiency and effectiveness of information systems, sources and services towards a new ‘focus on people and the contexts in which they use information’ (Case, 2016, p.15). Wilson (1999, p.249) has defined information behaviour as ‘the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information seeking, and use. Wilson’s substantial body of work has developed theories and models of information behaviour, which along with Dervin’s (1976) Sense-Making Theory, have been foundational in enabling a change in research focus from information needs and uses to information seeking and users (Case, 2016). Information seeking is a ‘situation-evoked’ process (Wang, 2011, p.17, as cited in Ruthven & Kelly, 2011) which can be both a goal orientated process with ‘a set objective of resolving a specific need via a specific source’ (Case, 2016, p.89) or an ‘adaptive’ as opposed to ‘a linear or rational process’ (Ford, 2015, p.63)

In the information society information behaviour ‘pervades every aspect of our lives’ (Ford, 2015, p.1) both public and private, yet ‘often escapes observation’ (Case, 2016, p.7). As a result, improving our understanding of the ways in which ‘individuals perceive, seek, understand, and use information in various life contexts’ (Case, 2016, p.3) in addition to how and why individuals can ‘hide, avoid, ignore and destroy information’ (Ford, 2015, p.17) is of significant contemporary relevance. Information behaviour serves as both an ‘inclusive’ and ‘intuitive’ concept (Wang, 2011, p.16, as cited in Ruthven & Kelly, 2011) which ‘transforms distinct notions of need, seeking and use into unified investigation of the processes by which people become informed’ (Fisher, Erdelez & McKechnie, 2005a, p.114). Theories of information behaviour highlight the extent by which ‘information takes on different meanings in different contexts’ (Pettigrew, 1999, p.809). What constitutes information, where it can be found and how/why it is used or not used can be shaped by issues of culture, community, and competence.

### *2.3.1.2      Foregrounding the social and cultural factors which shape information behaviour*

Theories of information behaviour which foreground the socio-cultural context within which information is understood, created, and utilised have demonstrated ‘that information cannot be easily separated from the practices, meanings, and actions that shape social activity’ (Case, 2016, p.56). Marcella & Baxter (2000, p.239) have evidenced that ‘social class has a direct impact on both information need and information seeking behaviour’. As a result, issues of what, who and how we know, in addition to when and where we go to obtain information are intrinsically linked. This is particularly evident in theories of information poverty which conceptualise an impoverished information world (Chatman, 1996) as a culture (Childers & Post, 1975 as cited in Case, 2016, p.121) or way of life (Savolainen, 1995), defined by an inability to engage with a host of activities, sources, and types of people. In this sociocultural understanding of information poverty ‘the fabric of social life...set initial (and for some, lasting) boundaries within which to play out one’s life’ (Chatman, 1999, p.209), resulting in negative implications for development as individuals/groups/communities do ‘not have the competency to appreciate what is meaningful and worthy of engagement’ (Savolainen 1995, p.262).

### *2.3.1.3      Information Behaviour and Public Libraries*

The study of information behaviour is a tool which can be utilised within the public library context to aid understanding of how disadvantaged communities perceive library services, why they may not engage and what changes public libraries need to make to extend their reach into these communities. Furthermore, studies of information behaviour, most notably in the work of authors such as Karen Fisher & Elfreda Chatman can provide invaluable insight into the realities of how information is used to sustain and constrain day to day life within disadvantaged groups and communities. For some individuals ‘the gap between their own culture and that of the library is unbridgeable’ (Muddiman et al., 1999, p.184 as cited in Birdi et al., 2008, p.582). However, for public libraries theories of information behaviour, particularly those which consider socio-cultural context, can help inform the development of socially inclusive library services which can bridge this gap.

## 2.3.2      Fisher

### 2.3.2.1      *Introduction*

The study of information behaviour has generated a body of research focused on the everyday information behaviour of individuals which spotlights ‘the social context, interaction and discourse through which the sharing of information occurs’ (Pettigrew, 1999, p.810-811). Influenced by, and as a result notably contributing to, this research tradition is the work of Karen Fisher (néé Pettigrew) who has acknowledged that the ‘social context framework’ of information behaviour aided her doctoral research by facilitating ‘the theoretical identification of *information grounds*’ (Fisher, Durrance & Hinton, 2004, p.756). Fisher defines an information ground as an ‘environment temporarily created by the behaviour of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information’ (Pettigrew, 1999, p.811). Information ground theory has been embraced within LIS research, generating evidence of the existence of information grounds amongst different groups such as: foot clinic patients (1999), public library literacy program participants (2004) and college students (2007). These studies have demonstrated that an information ground can enrich the lives of those involved by enabling both formal and informal information sharing, facilitating wider social interaction, and building a sense of community. Key to the success of an information ground are issues of **Place**, **Interaction** and **Connection**.

### 2.3.2.2      *Place*

Whilst an information ground ‘can occur anywhere at any time’ (Fisher et al, 2004, p.757), the **place** within which an information ground arises is of significance to its nature, permanence, and impact. Fisher, Landry & Naumer (2007a) argue that within theories of information behaviour ‘the ambient role of *place* has been subsumed within the broader big picture, meaning little attention has been paid to understanding the specific effects of social settings on information flow’. The importance of place is particularly evident in Fisher et al’s (2007a) research with students, where in building on IG theory to identify a ‘people-place-information trichotomy’, ‘place-related’ factors were evidenced as the second most important element of an information ground behind information-related factors ‘as students favoured information grounds based on their familiarity, comfort and convenience’. As a result, information grounds can be seen as comparable to Ray

Oldenburg's (1999) concept of third place, with Fisher, Naumer & Durrance (2005b) acknowledging the existence of 'parallels' between the two concepts. For Oldenburg (1999, pp.22-42) a third place is a 'neutral', 'accessible' 'engaging' 'home away from home', perhaps best correlated with classic 1980s sitcom Cheers (Johnson & Griffis, 2009, p.160). Cheers typifies Oldenburg's theory via the significance of the interactions and relationships facilitated by the role of the bar in the lives of its regulars, who represent an array of diverse social types.

#### *2.3.2.3 Interaction*

Fisher et al (2004, p.756) argues that within an information ground 'Social interaction is a primary activity' with the obtaining of information 'a byproduct', highlighting the potential additional benefits of many community-based activities. Within an information ground communication is key, providing the mechanism for information to be 'shared in multiple directions... both purposefully and serendipitously' (Pettigrew, 1999, p.812). In research focusing on public libraries as places for activity, research has evidenced that in addition to the intended objective of improving the literacy of child participants, baby story time sessions were also providing a space for parents to spontaneously share and obtain information on a range of pertinent topics (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009). The holistic impact of library services such as baby story times and knitting groups (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007), serves to demonstrate the wider potential of information ground theory to community-based services such as Public Libraries. Fisher et al (2004, p.764) outlines the need for libraries to 'create inverted information grounds', which she argues could be achieved by enriching library facilitated services and activities to enhance social interaction.

#### *2.3.2.4 Connection*

Public libraries provide one of the few public spaces where people from all walks of life can interact whilst undertaking distinct or collaborative endeavours serving as an 'inclusive place that promotes the broadening of social networks' (Spink & Cole, 2006, p.96) within communities. A public library in its entirety is not an information ground, but rather information grounds can be cultivated by public libraries through the services, activities, and spaces they provide within communities which encourage and enable communication, connection, and cohesion. Fisher's information ground concept when applied in the library context, highlights the role of public libraries as facilitators of social as well as cultural

capital. By providing a community-based means of cultural participation, public libraries serve as a trusted place where individuals have the opportunity to connect with those whom they share common needs, interests or values, serving to 'enhance disadvantaged people's access to social networks that will empower them' (Phillipson, Allan, & Morgan 2004, p7). Information ground theory is bolstered by drawing on Granovetter's 'Strength of Weak Ties' theory to explain the beneficial aspects of adding to the diversity of an individuals' social network. Granovetter famously argued that it is weak as opposed to strong ties which provide 'the channels through which ideas, influences, or information socially distant from the ego may reach him' (Granovetter, 1973, p.1370-71, as cited in Fisher et al 2005a, p.345). This is significant within the context of information grounds, which serve to facilitate the connection of individuals who might otherwise not have encountered each other.

### *2.3.2.5 Conclusion*

The concept of 'information grounds'- social settings for serendipitous information sharing during social interactions, provides a tool by which public libraries can better understand and advocate the qualitative impact of cultural services and activities which involve social engagement and interactions. At present interactive library activities such as book groups, film clubs, and story times are evaluated in quantitative terms by the number of participants involved. However, there is a growing appreciation within LIS that 'these output and performance measures... do not shed enough light on the value of the library to the user and the impact on his or her life' (Huysmans & Oomes, 2013, p.169). When viewed through the lens of information ground theory, an enhanced understanding of how public libraries can transform, enrich and empower socially marginalised individuals and communities by enabling social engagement and interactions (Goulding, 2004) through the cultural services they offer could be achieved. Furthermore, information grounds along with related theories of third place, provide a model for public libraries to develop services, activities and spaces which encourage and enable communication, connection, and cohesion.

## 2.3.3      Chatman

### *2.3.3.1 Introduction*

Pivotal to understanding the information behaviour of disadvantaged and marginalized groups is the work of Elfreda Chatman, who through her research with a range of groups

from the elderly to prison inmates, foregrounded the social factors which shape the boundaries, define the barriers, and limit the benefit of information flow to those most in need. Chatman's three key theories of *Information Poverty* (1996), *Life in the Round* (1999) and *Normative Behaviour* (2000) can be read and applied independently of each other, however, are arguably at their most powerful when considered in connection with each other. The overarching concepts which link the theories such as **perception**, **norms** and **behaviour** form a theoretical oeuvre which continues to have an impact on theories of information behaviour within the discipline of LIS and beyond.

### 2.3.3.2 Perception

How an individual perceives themselves, the world, and their place within it has a significant impact on their information behaviour, with perception instrumental to Chatman's theory of Information Poverty (1996) and associated constitutive concepts such as worldview and insiders/outside. In disadvantaged communities, residents adopt a dual position as both 'insider' within the boundaries of that community and 'outsider' to the world at large. This dichotomy is reinforced by a worldview which acts as a 'mental picture or cognitive map that interprets the world' (Chatman, 1999, p.213) defining 'those things that are important to pay attention to and those things that are not' (Chatman, 1996, p.194) and which 'shapes, changes, and modifies an individual's perception about the world, to correspond to what other members perceive' (Chatman, 2000, p.12). A worldview which is inward facing and narrow in focus can negatively impact on the process of information seeking as issues of trust and relevance act as barriers to wider engagement with perceived 'outside' sources. In addition, Chatman's research with janitors (Chatman, 1990) and prison inmates (Chatman, 1999) highlighted that rather than their shared experiences providing trust and bonding mechanisms, that instead a pervading sense of distrust and alienation meant that even fellow 'insiders' were perceived to be 'outsiders' within an impoverished information world.

Chatman defines an 'impoverished information world' as 'one in which a person is unwilling or unable to solve a critical worry or concern' (Chatman, 1996, p.197). Both the willingness and ability of individuals to satisfy an information need are influenced by perceptions of relevance, utility, and cost versus benefit. In Chatman's research with the working poor the extent to which perceptions of situational relevance act as a barrier to information access



and adoption, can be appreciated in the context of both professional and private issues which they believe to be 'outside their control' or having 'little or no value to their lived experience' (Chatman, 1996, p.202). Further to this in Chatman's study with the elderly in a retirement community she detected that elderly residents engaged in self-protective behaviours such as deception and secrecy to mask information needs in situations where they 'perceived a search for information to be too costly' to the maintenance of a positive public perception of their health (Chatman, 2000, p.7). In this context, pursuing a health-related information need was perceived as a risk with accompanying possible consequences such as stigma, isolation and eviction, deemed to outweigh the health benefits which could be achieved from obtaining the information.

### 2.3.3.3 *Norms*

Perception, as characterised by associated concepts such as worldview, insiders/outside and relevance, both shapes and is shaped by social norms. Chatman (1999, p.213) introduced the concept of social norms as a key characteristic of a 'Life in the Round', arguing that they are the 'customary patterns' which provide 'a sense of balance' and a method by which to 'gauge normalcy' and 'a collective sense of direction and order'. Social norms orientate beliefs, aspirations, and behaviour in line with the worldview of a specific group or community, limiting awareness of 'the cultural, educational and social norms that are fundamental to the greater social world' (Chatman, 2001, p.3). Chatman has evidenced the existence of those social norms which facilitate rounding in physical communities, are also evident within the 'netiquette' of virtual communities, highlighting that 'virtual communities develop complex sets of norms governing not only behaviour, but also influencing the attitudes, interests, and language of participants' (Burnett, Besant & Chatman, 2001, p.542).

The prevalence of social norms within rounded communities is further reinforced by adherence to a belief in social types which represent not 'an actual person but the culmination of exhibited behaviour that forms a specific perspective' (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, p.737). The existence and effect of social types can be best appreciated in Chatman's research with prison inmates, where the allocation of social types such as 'bride' and 'bitch guard' provide inmates with 'a commonsense system in which to create a typology of persons' (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, p.737). For inmates, the allocation of

social types is both a communal act of classification and a sense making activity, which orientates expectations of behaviour and defines subsequent interactions. Furthermore, the concept of social types when applied to communities, both those bonded by location or interests, helps to explain the polarisation of meanings and assumptions attached to social types such as 'policeman', 'pensioner' and 'politician'. As social types correspond to the worldview of a specific community what is a positive term, deriving from positive experiences, in one community could have a converse meaning in other. As a result, 'social types are never neutral' (Chatman, 1999, p.214) and often reveal as much about the classifier as what/who has been classified.

#### 2.3.3.4 *Behaviour*

The combination of perception and norms provide the context and motivating mechanisms for the development of normative and self-protective behaviours within disadvantaged communities. Normative behaviour is 'behaviour which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context' and which provides 'a predictable, routine, and manageable approach to everyday reality' (Burnett et al., 2001, p.538). A 'life in the round' is one which is characterised by routine, with people acting in accordance with the expectations of both 'outsiders' and 'insiders' (Chatman, 1999). These expectations defined and legitimized by social norms and social types, 'set initial (and in some cases, lasting) boundaries in which to play out one's life-world' (Chatman, 2000, p.8) which 'most members feel disinclined to cross' (Burnett et al., 2001, p.537). This disinclination manifests itself in self-protective behaviours such as secrecy and deception which are used as 'shields' from 'cosmopolitan' outward facing behaviours and information sources, which do not fit with what they already know, value and find relevant in the round. (Chatman, 1999, p.2).

Chatman (2000, p.10) argued that a 'life in the round will... have a negative effect on information seeking' behaviour as the social and cultural boundaries which define this way of life, act as barriers to the process of information seeking which becomes 'normative' in this context. The social norms which drive a life in the round also act as the 'sacred standards...that verify and legitimize the appropriateness' of 'information-seeking strategies' (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, p.742), determining what types of information to seek and share and as a result crucially become the 'sine qua non by which sources are

either sought or ignored' (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, p.735). Chatman (2001, p.15) evidenced that whilst those living in the round may not 'feel compelled to engage in information-seeking strategies... they can still exhibit information behaviours'. For Chatman, information behaviour provided a mechanism for explaining those activities not limited to information seeking such as avoidance, rejection and passive gathering of information, providing a 'construct through which to approach everyday reality and its effect on actions to gain or avoid the possession of information'. (Burnett et al., 2001, p.538)

### 2.3.3.5 *Conclusion*

Given her background in librarianship, it is only natural that Chatman would address how her theories of 'information poverty', 'life in the round' and 'normative behaviour' could be applied by library practitioners. Chatman (2001, p.15-16) believed that public libraries 'have a marvelous opportunity to engage ordinary people to make sense from their daily reality...and...enrich their lives'. However, to realise this opportunity, library practitioners need to 'reflect on the relationship' between libraries and the small worlds of which they are part. An important first step for Chatman was the need to address the unhelpful professional terminology of library 'user' and 'non-user' which mirror both insider/outsider distinctions and classify individuals as a social type with expected standards of behaviour- in this case library use or non-use. In addition, Chatman (Pendleton & Chatman, 1998, p.749) highlighted the impact of a librarian worldview on the library 'programs and services' provided which 'seem to indicate that we cater to the 'users' because 'they' are like 'us''. To fully engage with all members of a community, PL's need to consider the **perceptions**, **norms** and **behaviours** which act as barriers to library use. To facilitate this process more LIS research is needed which focuses on PL users and non-users which '*looks* at their social environment and that *defines* information from *their* perspective' (Chatman, 1996, p.205).

## 2.3.4 Savolainen

### 2.3.4.1 *Introduction*

Reijo Savolainen has made a significant contribution to the discipline of LIS by building on and critically engaging with theories of information behaviour which consider everyday information seeking and the socio-cultural contexts which determine the strategies adopted, the sources utilised and the success of the outcome. Savolainen (1995, p.262-263) is perhaps best known for his theory of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) which

argues that the practice of everyday life or 'way of life' is characterised by a socially and culturally determined 'order of things'. This 'inherently conservative' order provides individuals with 'an internal coherence of everyday things' which guides choices and actions in accordance with the individual and collective expectations encompassing their way of life. Maintaining the 'structured' and 'predictable' routine afforded by the existence of and awareness of such expectations is achieved via 'Mastery of life', which constrains and orientates practice to the extent whereby 'the daily practices of everyday life begin to establish themselves in a natural order, being perceived as self-evident' (Savolainen, 1995, p.264). Mastery of life can be evidenced in both passive adherence to the status quo and active information seeking practice, to rectify a situation where 'the order of things has been shaken or threatened' (Savolainen, 1995, p.264-265).

Building on his early work in relation to ELIS, Savolainen has utilised theories from a range of disciplines, most notably social phenomenology, to expand and enrich both his own work and more broadly the discipline of information behaviour to develop an alternative theoretical umbrella concept of information practice. The concepts differ in so far as 'within the discourse on information behaviour, the 'dealing with information' is primarily seen to be triggered by an individual's needs and motives' whereas 'within the discourse of information practice, dealing with information is primarily driven by socially and culturally shaped values and interests' (Savolainen, 2008, p.48). An emphasis on information practice as opposed to behaviour enabled Savolainen to incorporate issues of **practice, preference and literacy** and as a result improve our understanding of 'the cognitive competence of information seekers as well as the socio-cultural factors affecting that competence' (Savolainen, 1995, p.261). This is of interest in the context of LIS, as issues of cognitive/cultural competence and the socio-cultural context which determines their development and perceived value, serve as mutually reinforcing **barriers** to the practice of everyday social and cultural participation, such as library use.

#### *2.3.4.2 Practice*

Everyday information practices (EIP) can be defined as 'a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use and share the information in various sources' which are 'embedded in everyday contexts' and 'self-evident (in) nature' (Savolainen, 2008, p.2-3).

Savolainen argues (2008, p.4) that theories of EIP provide a marked contrast to the 'individualist and often decontextualized' theories of information behaviour, by foregrounding the role of socio-cultural factors in constructing, conditioning and constraining modes of EIP. Central to EIP are the concepts of 'practice' and 'stock of knowledge'. Practices constitute social interactions which 'are embodied, materially mediated arrays of human action, centrally organized around shared understanding' (Savolainen, 2008, p.24). Shared understanding is provided by 'the stock of knowledge' which can be understood as socially derived cultural experience (Savolainen, 2008, p.27) which provides 'a tool to deal with everyday occurrences' (Savolainen, 2008, p.56) and a system of typologies to orient EIP.

By adopting a 'social phenomenological perspective' towards concepts such as 'practice' and 'stock of knowledge' in developing his theory of EIP, Savolainen makes an interesting departure from an earlier theoretical alignment with the work of French sociologist, and critic of phenomenology, Pierre Bourdieu. Savolainen's theory of ELIS (1995) was most notably inspired by Bourdieu's theory of habitus, defined by Savolainen (1995, p.262) as 'a socially and culturally determined system of thinking, perception, and evaluation, internalized by the individual... by which individuals integrate their experiences and evaluate the importance of different choices'. Savolainen devised the concept of 'way of life' to serve within the theory of ELIS as 'the practical manifestation of habitus'. In addition to habitus, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital defined by Savolainen (1995, p.269) as 'cognitive resources acquired through education and life experience', provided useful 'thinking tools' with which to understand the socio-cultural context within which information sources were located, utilised and favoured by different classes during the practice of ELIS. Sociologist Will Atkinson (2010, p.2) has argued that 'reconceiving the habitus as more akin to the stock of knowledge can surmount the overly nonconscious and corporeal conceptualization of action it otherwise entails', this argument provides a unifying bridge between theories of ELIS and EIP to enable an understanding of practice which is both routine and creative and subject to the influence of both cognitive and affective factors. (Savolainen, 2008, p.30).

#### 2.3.4.3 *Preference*

A key element of everyday life are the preferences individuals display in relation to the consumption of goods, services, media, and activities. Savolainen (1995, p.264), in accordance with Bourdieusian theory on the socially conditioned nature of taste, argues that the class and culture we are born into 'gives basic models for mastery of life' and so 'directs habits and attitudes' and ultimately preferences. As a result, how we choose to spend our leisure time for example, represents an adherence to the 'order of things' which provides a framework governing the preferences appropriate to our 'way of life'. This is of interest in the course of ELIS, as information practices and preferences are shaped by 'the character of a person's informational orientation, as well as the social and cultural capital on which this orientation is built' (Savolainen, 1995, p.289). In essence then the newspapers we read, whether we frequent public libraries etc constitute information practices which are in fact not a choice, but rather a socially & culturally determined 'choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1984), given that individuals must 'always choose within the limits of their competence, which is built on social and cultural factors' (Savolainen, 1995, p.290).

#### 2.3.4.4 *Literacy*

At the core of all library services is a foundational commitment to supporting, enhancing, and developing literacy. Public libraries provide 'rich literate environments' (UNESCO, 2006, p.17) which offer vast collections of information in written, visual and electronic formats. A contemporary practical focus on information literacy, has increased the prominence and relevance of public libraries, which are well placed to support the development of the increasingly 'complex and dynamic' multi literacies (UNESCO, 2006, p.147) which are essential competencies in modern society. Tuominen, Savolainen & Talja (2005, p.331) however argue that the delivery of information literacy training would be aided by LIS theory development and research which views information literacy as a sociotechnical practice which 'evolves ... and is learned in relation to specific knowledge contents and situational contexts'. The skills, competencies and attributes which constitute being regarded as information literate are socially conditioned which Tuominen et al (2005, p.337) argue has resulted in 'authorized literacies as well as resistant or marginalized literacies'. The idea of there being a set, universally achievable and applicable standard of information literacy which can be taught exacerbates the digital divide by failing to consider the social,

cultural, and technological contexts in which marginalised communities can use and access ICT. For Tuominen et al (2005, p.341) information literacy programs within public libraries should not be focused on aiding reproduction of mainstream conceptions of information literacy, but rather 'enabling groups and communities to cultivate existing information strategies and supporting them in their interactions with information technologies'.

#### *2.3.4.5 Barriers*

Socio-cultural barriers to information seeking are defined by Savolainen (2016, pp.53-54) as 'human-made constructs mainly stemming from social norms and normative expectations, as well as cultural values' which 'constrain people's access to information' by 'delimiting the range of choices available'. Distinct but interlinked types of external socio-cultural barriers relate to issues of language, stigma, capital, norms, and exclusionary institutional and organizational cultures. Common features of these barriers are the extent to which the practice of information seeking is hindered, restricted, delayed and gives rise to negative behaviours. Interestingly Savolainen (2016, p.52) differentiates between internal and external barriers by stating that 'external barriers originate outside an individual and are thus imposed'. However, the 'cognitive' and 'affective' internal barriers to information seeking identified by the author, could also be understood as 'imposed' by external socio-cultural determinants. Savolainen (1999, p.17) has highlighted the potential benefit of Bourdieusian theory to 'help us to understand more deeply the cultural and social embeddedness of information seeking practices'. As a result, internal cognitive information seeking barriers such as an 'unawareness of relevant information sources and poor search skills' (Savolainen, 2016, p.52) can be understood as resulting from the lack of 'material, social, and cultural (cognitive) capital owned by the individual' which provides the 'basic equipment to seek and use information' (Savolainen, 1995, p.267). Furthermore, affective internal information seeking barriers can also be understood as socio-culturally determined as 'affective coping strategies draw on learned cultural habits' (Savolainen, 1999, p.19).

#### *2.3.4.6 Conclusion*

Savolainen has contributed much to the discipline of LIS, most notably by utilising complimentary concepts from disciplines such as sociology and philosophy, to provide an alternative theoretical lens through which to view issues of **practice, preference, literacy,**

and **barriers**. Of particular interest are Savolainen's attempts to surmount 'the problems faced in the 'translation' of Bourdieu's concepts into the vocabulary of LIS' (Savolainen, 1999, p.18). Bourdieusian concepts such as capital, habitus, field, and practice provide much of the theoretical foundation upon which Savolainen's theory of ELIS and arguably information practice is based. Despite largely moving away from a theoretical alignment with Bourdieu in recent years, a detailed understanding, exploration, and application of contemporary interpretations of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital could better enrich Savolainen's (1995, p.261) efforts to examine and evidence 'the cognitive competence of information seekers as well as the socio-cultural factors affecting that competence'. Of particular relevance within the domain of public libraries, theories of cultural capital in tandem with theories and models of information practice could provide a theoretical framework from which to better understand the barriers to and benefits of everyday cultural participation by marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and communities.

## 2.4 Cultural Capital

### 2.4.1 What is cultural capital?

#### 2.4.1.1 *Introduction*

Pierre Bourdieu's influential work *Distinction* (1984) sought to explain the multi-dimensional nature of inequality through evidencing a reciprocal relationship to something as seemingly inconsequential as taste. Bourdieu argued that tastes are not naturally determined by individuals but instead socially conditioned, reinforcing a power structure which reproduces social hierarchies of class divisions. For Bourdieu (1984, p.468-9) 'Taste... Functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position'. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital arose from a 'need to identify the principle of social effects' which lay at the root of inequality which made 'different individuals obtain very unequal profits from virtually equivalent...capital' (Bourdieu 1986, p.116). By doing so Bourdieu (1986, p.106) was able 'to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success....to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes'. The foundational concepts of capital, habitus, and field upon which this argument rests form a complex intertwined theoretical framework, which despite the inaccessibility of



the language used and the absence of specific definitions, continue to be widely utilised in contemporary research across a broad range of disciplines more than three decades later.

The application of some or all of these 'thinking tools' (Waquant, 1989, p.50) however are rarely attempted in a strictly Bourdieusian sense as the significant societal and technological changes since the publication of 'distinction' would make this difficult, given how well it could be argued that Bourdieu's theories effectively captured French society in the 1960s as opposed to a more transferable abstract picture of society not tied to the contexts of time and place. Bourdieu himself up until his death in 2002 continuously revisited his original theories, providing both revisions and greater clarification. His substantial body of work can be understood as almost a collective continuous career spanning conversation which, synonymous with his use of the interview technique towards the end of his career, to fully appreciate requires location of all the voices taking part from Bourdieu himself to his numerous critics and supporters, which have contributed to this landmark narrative on social inequality. In doing so the researcher continues the conversation by adding their own voice, providing fresh talking points to lead the conversation with regards to cultural capital in a more inclusive direction.

#### *2.4.1.2 Cultural Capital Acquisition: Home and School*

For Bourdieu (1984, p.69) there are two 'modes of acquisition- domestic and scholastic... of cultural capital'. The domestic transmission of cultural capital in the home 'functions as a sort of advance (both a head-start and a credit) which, by providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture' (Bourdieu 1984, p.63), facilitating the subsequent scholastic acquisition of cultural capital which 'presupposes and completes it' (Bourdieu 1984, p.59). It is within the home that the tastes and dispositions of children are formed, reinforced, and encouraged through immersion in a way of life defined by the volume of social, economic, and cultural capital possessed by the family. Within the domestic transmission of cultural capital both mother and father have distinct roles to play. The fathers' role is understood in the traditional sense of provider, with his occupation status an indicator of the family's cultural capital and the corresponding economic advantages providing the means for their children to pursue educational qualifications. The

role of the mother is also traditional in the sense of nurturer, with the transmission of domestic cultural capital being another facet of a mother's duty to bring out the best in their children, the achievement of which is aided by the requisite free time (Bourdieu 1986, p.113) afforded by an absence of economic constraints, to dedicate to this objective.

Cultural capital 'always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition' (Bourdieu 1986, p.108) to the extent that 'Only an institution like the school.... could offset (at least partially) the initial disadvantage of those who do not receive from their family circle the encouragement to undertake cultural activities' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, p.210). Children from affluent backgrounds are able to perform better within the education system as the curriculum is geared towards them, placing an emphasis on the need to acquire and value skills and interests aligned with their social trajectory. The education system reinforces class differences by privileging legitimate culture, enabling children from affluent backgrounds to use the education they receive to their advantage as they have the 'connections', i.e., the social capital that is needed to make the most of economic and cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1984, p.338). Both the home and the school play complimentary but differing roles in enabling individuals to acquire the three 'expressions' of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised.

#### *2.4.1.3 Expressions of Cultural Capital: Embodied, Objectified and Institutionalised*

Embodied cultural capital understood as the 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu 1986, p.106) originates in the home, with 'The embodied cultural capital of the previous generations' (Bourdieu 1984, p.63) acting as both an inheritance and an example. These benefits go 'unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence' (Bourdieu 1986, p.108) attributing to the possessor a further degree of prestige assuming personal attainment as opposed to assistance. However, acquiring embodied cultural capital is a long personal process which cannot simply be gifted to someone, instead requiring a personal desire for cultivation and self-improvement (Bourdieu 1986, p.107) as 'cultivated pleasure, which presupposes 'slow efforts to improve the mind' (Bourdieu 1984, p.495), manifested in participation in cultural activities, active engagement with cultural objects and efforts to develop cultural knowledge. To embody cultural capital there has to be a

commitment to so doing, an appreciation of the various and often subtle ways in which an individual can progress on the journey to legitimate embodiment. For Bourdieu (1990, p.210) embodied cultural capital recognises that culture 'is not what one is but what one has, or rather what one has become' providing the foundation which enables the appropriation of both objectified and institutionalised cultural capital.

Objectified cultural capital is commonly understood as a familiarity with objects of cultural significance such as books, paintings, and artefacts. Bourdieu (1986, p.109) argues that 'cultural goods can be appropriated both materially- which presupposes economic capital- and symbolically – which presupposes cultural capital'. The value of cultural objects lies not just in their ownership in an economic sense but also the ownership of the relevant competence in the form of the cultural skills enabled by an individual's embodied cultural capital, to truly understand the object as 'the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competences which are not distributed universally... these products are subject to exclusive appropriation... they yield a profit in distinction.... and a profit in legitimacy' (Bourdieu 1984, p.225). This latter prerequisite of true ownership of cultural objects represents the two-tiers of objectified cultural capital, highlighting the extent to which providing physical access to cultural objects does not necessarily guarantee their full accessibility.

Institutionalised cultural capital is typically understood as 'cultural capital academically sanctioned' with formal academic qualifications acting as 'a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture' (Bourdieu 1986, p.109-110). Essentially then a university education provides students both with a level of competency with regards to their area of study, but more broadly 'function[ing] like a sort of "trademark"' (Bourdieu 1984, p.58) which can be applied across a range of social fields. Bourdieu (1984, p.388) argues that 'The 'culture' which an educational qualification is presumed to guarantee is one of the basic components in the dominant definition of the accomplished man'. Institutional cultural capital when combined with embodied and objectified cultural capital in addition to social and economic capital, enables children of the affluent classes to continue an ascending social trajectory which reproduces social inequality.

#### 2.4.1.4 *Situating cultural capital within Bourdieu's theoretical framework*

Bourdieu wrote extensively about an array of differing but connected capitals (linguistic, human, symbolic, information, political, technical, financial), however there are three key forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Although both social and cultural capital can be 'derived from economic capital', economic capital lies not at the root of social and cultural capital themselves but rather at 'the root of their effects' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.113). Bourdieu points out that the lucky spin of a roulette wheel can endow someone with economic capital but not social or cultural capital as these cannot be obtained instantaneously. However, in continuing Bourdieu's casino example an individual's economic capital determines at which casino tables a person can use their social and cultural capital 'chips' as well as the value of those 'chips' at that table. Bourdieu argues that the term 'capital' can also be understood as 'power' and so whilst economic capital may serve to magnify their power, social and cultural capital are still sources of power in their own regard, both individually and collectively, and are 'never entirely reducible' to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p.113).

Social capital as with cultural capital for Bourdieu (1986, p.111), contributes to social stratification as the power 'derived from association with a rare, prestigious' social group, leads to unequal access to opportunities as within the group 'durable obligations subjectively felt' govern the interactions between members, who all seek to utilise the individual and collective social capital of the group to further their own interests and in so doing the interests of the group. According to Bourdieu's theory of social capital admittance to prestigious universities would be more likely for children of former alumni of those institutions, as not only would parents wish to continue the advantageous family link, but the institution would also seek to aid this mutually beneficial reproduction. Membership of exclusive social groups is the result of a series of 'investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term'. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.122)

The idea that pursuit of capital may be undertaken either consciously or unconsciously relates to a further essential theory within Bourdieu's theoretical framework: habitus. Habitus is how we see the world, which is both determined by and determines our place in

the world 'The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure' (Bourdieu 1984, p.166). Each individual's habitus can be understood as a version of the larger collective social group habitus to which they belong, which in turn is an aggregate of all of the individual habitus that collectively merge whilst still retaining a degree of autonomy. The collective habitus of a social group serves to determine what is deemed of value to that group (cultural capital) and helps members work together to obtain this (social capital). Bourdieu argues that the power of the collective group habitus lies in 'the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will' (Bourdieu 1984, p.468).

The habitus is further supported by Bourdieu's theory of doxa defined as 'common sense, received ideals' (Bourdieu, 1999, p.123). Doxa can be understood as the consensus of feeling, collective values and common codes of belief amongst social class groups, which are taken for granted by members as self-evident, but are in fact shaped by the habitus of the group to which they belong. For example, children from affluent backgrounds predominantly believe that attending university is a natural and desirable next step after finishing secondary school. However, the choice to apply to university has been socially conditioned according to Bourdieu, by both the habitus and the doxa of the individual and the social group to which they belong. Furthermore, in the context of Bourdieu's theoretical framework the outcome of the university application is then determined by the social, cultural, and economic capital possessed by the applicant.

The final piece of the theoretical puzzle for Bourdieu can be explained in terms of the concept of fields, which are the various social spheres within which our habitus and capital function. A field is best imagined as a sporting field which implies that a game is being played which has rules, objectives, and outcomes. Fields are the arenas in which social stratification play out as Bourdieu argues that not only are members of the affluent classes raised learning the rules of the game and the skills which will help them succeed, but crucially they are oriented towards competing ensuring that they reap the spoils. Bourdieu (1984, p.247) believed that 'Culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it; and interest

in culture, without which there is no race, no competition, is produced by the very race and competition which it produces'. Therefore, those lacking both the necessary capital to take part and the habitus to orient them towards participation are left unable to alter their social trajectory, which success in the game could help facilitate.

The relationship between the theoretical concepts of capital, habitus and field can be understood as:  $[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice$  (Bourdieu 1984, p.95). The two potential definitions of practice contained in this formula provide the foundation for two of the key strands of research inspired by Bourdieu which have adopted a cultural capital perspective. In defining practice in terms of standard practice, researchers have sought to provide an 'explanation of the connections between social privilege and academic success' (Kingston, 2001, p.88) which can be evidenced in the discernible pattern of a high probability of educational attainment levels corresponding to class level. In defining practice as the actions of individuals or groups researchers have attempted to investigate 'how we come to habituate ourselves to certain routines and thereby practices' (Bennett et al., 2009, p.13) and in so doing address questions of whether our tastes and the corresponding activities to which we are inclined can be socially determined. Understanding the varying ways in which cultural capital has been defined and applied in both research strands, provides the necessary foundational theoretical framework from which to best sensitise the concept for the purposes of this study.

## 2.4.2 Cultural capital and educational inequality

### 2.4.2.1 Defining and applying cultural capital theory within the sociology of education

Lamont & Lareau (1988, p.153) argued that as 'work dealing with cultural capital has grown, the concept has come to assume a large number of, at times, contradictory meanings'. In the intervening three decades the 'proliferation of definitions' has increased considerably, as has the resulting sense of 'sheer confusion' surrounding the concept. Bourdieu is routinely criticised for his unnecessarily complex and so often inaccessible writing style, a charge which whilst he acknowledges by admitting to adopting 'a language which, I must concede, did at times reach peaks of density and difficulty' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, P vii), he ultimately rejects as he maintains that he is not simply creating 'theory for its own sake' (Sullivan, 2001, p.894). By adopting an abductive approach, which is simultaneously

both deductive and inductive (Rawolle & Lingard, 2013, p.130), Bourdieu argues that he has created 'thinking tools' as opposed to 'conceptual gobbledegook' (Waquant, 1989, p.50). However, it could be argued that Bourdieu's failure to adequately define his concept of cultural capital has resulted in the lack of a clear 'consensus on what cultural capital means, whether it has an effect and what that effect is' (Dumais, 2002, p.49), with a continuous cycle of scholars attempting to interpret Bourdieu's meaning, with their own interpretation then in turn open to interpretation.

The theory of cultural capital was originally intended to explain the ways in which the education system reproduces as opposed to alleviates inequality, as a result it is within this discipline that Bourdieu's theory has gained most traction. A comprehensive overview of the variety of cultural capital definitions applied within the sociology of education is provided by Winkle-Wagner (2010, p.90), in a detailed monograph which seeks to address the question of whether a 'lack of consistent definitions and interpretations of cultural capital' has resulted in a 'concept that has lost its meaning'. Winkle-Wagner (2010, p.1) observes that 'It is as if cultural capital submits a framework of a house without a foundation or any blueprints about how to proceed in the construction'. Arguably a more accurate analogy would be that cultural capital theory is more akin to a house restoration project where academics select which original features to retain, what is not salvageable and when something needs updating. The tendency by academics to evaluate, adapt and progress the concept of cultural capital as opposed to creating a new Bourdieu-free concept, can be appreciated across the four categories of cultural capital definitions identified by Winkle-Wagner (2010, p.29): 'Highbrow' cultural capital, 'Contextually-Valued' cultural capital, 'Otherized' cultural capital and 'Bourdiesian framework' cultural capital.

#### *2.4.2.2 'Highbrow' cultural capital*

The dominant interpretation of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital originated from the research of DiMaggio (Kingston, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003), who defined cultural capital as 'interest in and experience with prestigious cultural resources' (DiMaggio & Mohr 1985, p.1233). In DiMaggio's research (e.g. DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995), cultural capital 'is seen as a supplementary resource – one that is ancillary to 'ability' – that students may draw on in interests of school success' (Lareau &

Weininger, 2003, p.574). DiMaggio's research which linked the concept of cultural capital to prestigious culture, influenced a generation of researchers who all sought to evidence the educational benefits derived from engagement with 'high status culture' (Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000; Eitle & Eitle, 2002). Sullivan (2001) tested the highbrow definition of cultural capital amongst primary school pupils to evidence the specific skills and competencies which can be derived from cultural participation and evaluate whether these have a positive impact on educational attainment. Sullivan (2001, p.909), found the educational 'return' pupils get from cultural participation is determined by the nature of the cultural activities themselves with some 'a means of intellectual self-development' which develop skills such as linguistic competence which are recognised and rewarded with others serving only as a means to 'communicate status'.

#### 2.4.2.3 '*Contextually-Valued*' cultural capital

The idea that 'all people could have cultural capital' (Winkle-Wagner 2010, p.29) but that the value of this capital is social determined, seeks to highlight the extent to which what is regarded as capital has no intrinsically superior value, with the value only being understood in the context of the specific field within which it is utilised. Studies which applied the concept of cultural capital from this perspective sought to move away from 'deterministic' (Jeannotte, 2003, p.39) critiques of Bourdieu to argue that 'Cultural capital is something that can be *achieved*' whilst acknowledging that 'it may be more *probable* that it is achieved if people are endowed with parental cultural capital' (Van De Werfhorst, 2010, p.159). In his examination of 'The unfulfilled promise of cultural capital theory' Kingston (2001, p.97) found that amongst the privileged classes 'home practices represent the impact of 'culture' But they do not represent exclusionary practices...they are educationally consequential because they directly stimulate intellectual development and engagement'. In making this observation Kingston is not rejecting the Bourdieusian argument that there is a social bias in determining cultural value or asserting that elite cultural activities are inherently of value, but rather that in the field of education 'some cultural practices tend to help everyone in school' (Kingston, 2001, p.97).



Continuing in this tradition of examining the socially determined value judgements associated with regarding cultural capital as a familiarity with highbrow culture, Lareau & Weininger (2003) argue that 'Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) does not specifically reference engagement with prestigious cultural resources, but instead seeks to identify 'the direct or indirect 'imposition' of evaluative norms favouring the children or families of a particular social milieu'. However, the foreword stresses a focus on the 'inculcation of a legitimate culture, selection, and legitimation' and an assertion that the text should not 'be read in complete isolation from those of my other works to which it is closely linked' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, P xi-vii). The term 'legitimate culture' is utilised extensively in discussions of cultural capital specifically evidenced via participation in high status cultural activities e.g., avant-garde theatre and jazz discussed in both 'Reproduction' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, p.74) and subsequently in 'Distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, whilst Lareau & Weininger (2003) fail to disentangle the concept of cultural capital from an association with highbrow culture, they do provide a welcome call for a broader definition which recognises the diverse range of non-fixed cultural skills and competencies relevant in contemporary society which are in theory open to all, begging the question of whether 'schools could be organized by other, more inclusive cultural principles' (Kingston, 2001, p.90).

#### 2.4.2.4 'Otherized' cultural capital

Bourdieu & Passeron (1977, p.164) argued that the education system conceals 'its *social function* of legitimating class differences behind its *technical function* of producing qualifications', by recognising and rewarding the cultural capital determined by privileged social groups. Recent attempts within the education system to address this issue can be understood as two distinct approaches. The first represents an 'attempt to build up relevant cultural capital' to enable students to have the familiarity with the dominant cultural capital to 'cope and succeed in a system which can be quite distinct' (Gillies, Wilson, Soden, Gray & McQueen, 2010, p.30) from their own culture. The second seeks to respect and embrace the distinct cultural capital evident amongst 'nondominant, marginalized, or underrepresented populations (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p.29) recognising 'the cultural strengths and assets that diverse families bring to the school community' (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010, pp.7-8). 'Otherized' concepts of cultural capital highlight 'the ethnocentric bias in the conventional

use of cultural capital' which ignores 'the multiple ways cultural resources of other groups also convert into capital' (Carter, 2003, p.137) which for some are perceived as more relevant resulting in a juggling game of contrasting cultural capitals across various fields. Although Bourdieu's discussion of a legitimate culture is closely linked to the idea of social, economic, and cultural privilege it does not necessarily presuppose a specific race or gender requirement, determining legitimacy in terms of the highest volume of these capitals which are predominantly evidenced amongst white, upper-class men.

#### *2.4.2.5 'Bourdieuian framework' cultural capital*

Winkle-Wagner (2010, p.93) argues that defining cultural capital within the context of Bourdieu's 'full theoretical scaffolding bolsters the explanatory potential of the concept'. By applying cultural capital in conjunction with additional Bourdieusian core concepts such as habitus and field, Dumais (2002) and Edgerton, Roberts & Peter (2013) achieved a nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender and cultural capital within the education system. Both studies evidence that habitus 'calibrates one's aspirations and appreciation of related actions' (Edgerton et al., 2013, p.305) as pupils begin to 'understand the availability and probability of various pathways for someone in their social position' (Edgerton et al., 2013, p.307). This process of realisation predominantly leads pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to 'self-select themselves out', however some pupils 'may see the accumulation of cultural capital as a way to overcome the obstacles' (Dumais, 2002, p.47). By highlighting that 'gendered patterns of socialization translate into gender differences in cultural capital, habitus and practice' (Edgerton et al 2013, p.304) and that parents, in particular mothers, 'hold the key to children's cultural participation' (Dumais, 2002, p.53) the authors are able to demonstrate that the gender bias evident in the propensity for boys to engage with sport and girls cultural activities can often be perpetuated within the home, with 'young boys and girls internalizing differing messages about their prospects' resulting in 'gender differences in terms of aspirations and dispositions' (Edgerton et al 2013, p.308).

### 2.4.3 Cultural capital and social inequality

#### *2.4.3.1 Cultural capital- Beyond Education*

Building on the theory of cultural capital outlined in 'Reproduction' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) with the publication of *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984), Bourdieu extended the scope of application of cultural capital theory beyond considerations of educational inequality to

wider social inequality by examining the role that ‘the character of different groups lifestyles, tastes, cultural competences, and participation, as well as attitudes in cultural, moral and political matters’ (Prieur & Savage, 2011, p.568) play in reproducing deep rooted inequalities in society. Bourdieu (1999, p.4) 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’, highlighting a need to consider the additional social and cultural factors which can result in inequality.

Cultural capital, as discussed in the context of the sociology of education, has predominantly been understood as ‘high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials’ adopted by the upper classes for the purpose of getting ahead via a process of ‘social and cultural exclusion’ of the lower classes (Lamont & Lareau 1988, p.156). However, in applying cultural capital theory to considerations of taste and cultural consumption a growing consensus amongst researchers can be appreciated which seeks to ‘challenge notions of legitimate culture’ (Manchester & Pett, 2015a) as being the sole determination of cultural capital. Such efforts highlight the need to move towards a more inclusive understanding of the nature of cultural tastes, abilities, knowledge, and participation which could be understood as constituting contemporary cultural capital. Theories of ‘Otherized cultural capital’, the erosion of traditional divisions of cultural value, the reduction in the relevance of high-status culture to young people and political agendas which identify the key role of cultural participation in achieving social inclusion, have opened the door to the possibility of a wider application of cultural capital.

#### *2.4.3.2 The role of cultural capital in determining taste & orientating cultural participation*

Contemporary theories of social and cultural stratification place a greater emphasis on cultural participation than taste, as what we do (behaviour) as opposed to what we like (preferences) characterises the cultural divide evident in modern society. Increasingly cultural participation can be understood as the ‘public manifestation of social boundaries’ (Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.169) with the line being drawn between those who participate and those who do not (Bennett et al., 2009). This can be evidenced by a recent UK study which found that ‘The wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population forms the most culturally active segment of all’ (Warwick Commission, 2015,

p.33). Oakley & O'Brien (2016, p.5) argue that contemporary cultural capital theory can be understood in terms of how 'differences in consumption patterns are linked to notions of value or worth' with two associated main models: omnivorous model & deficit model.

#### 2.4.3.3 *Omnivorous taste*

Peterson's (1992) concept of the cultural omnivore argued that amongst the upper classes there no longer exists an exclusive association with elite cultural activities, but rather 'an openness to appreciating everything', symbolic of a more respectful and 'inclusive' orientation amongst the upper classes towards participation in a wide range of cultural activities (Peterson & Kern, 1996, pp.904-905). In operationalising the theory, omnivorousness was measured in terms of the number of middle and low brow, alongside high-brow, cultural activities members of the elite classes participated in (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Further in a later study Peterson (2005, p.264) emphasised that omnivorousness should be understood 'as a measure of the breadth of taste and cultural consumption'. It has been argued that rather than be considered as a departure from culture capital theory, 'the new cultural capitalists are the 'omnivores' (DiMaggio & Mukhtar, 2004, p.171). In this context 'the emergence of the cultural omnivore is a cultural expression of personal qualities that are highly valued and thus rewarded in today's complex society' (van Eijck, 2000, p.208). A shift to an omnivorous disposition is consistent with the 'permanent revolution in tastes' predicted by Bourdieu (1984, p.279) and should therefore be understood as 'a new way of expressing distinction' and a contemporary 'form of cultural capital' (Warde et al., 2008, p.150) which reflects the current socio-cultural values of society. In this context it is the cultural capital of the upper classes which provides the means to appropriate diverse cultural forms, the habitus which orientates towards omnivore cultural participation and the doxa which represents a collective understanding of the decreased power of a solely elite cultural orientation.

Manchester & Pett (2015a) in an exploration of how cultural value is determined and experienced by young people from affluent and disadvantaged backgrounds, found that social and cultural reproduction is still very much evident in terms of cultural participation practices in the UK. According to their findings the class related omnivorous/univorous dispositions exhibited by parents can be observed amongst the cultural practices of young

people, supporting prior research evidencing the ‘significant’ impact the volume of family cultural capital has on the cultural participation of children (Willekens & Lievens, 2014). Manchester & Pett (2015a, p.224) evidenced that young people from more affluent backgrounds display ‘cosmopolitan cultural identities’ understood in terms of familiarity and ease with a range of cultural activities and an appreciation of the extent to which this could be used as a tool to get ahead. Whilst in contrast disadvantaged young people are ‘positioned and position themselves as ‘out of place’ or not ‘at home’ in relation to certain, valued cultural places and activities’.

The role of place attachment in cultural participation is often argued to be associated with the lower classes resulting from ‘the absence of life alternatives, as opposed to some form of conscious choice’ (Lewicka 2005, p.382). Bourdieu (1984, p.373) argued that the tastes of the lower classes do not reflect choice, but merely a choice of the necessary ‘Necessity imposes a taste for necessity which implies a form of adaptation to and consequently acceptance of the necessary’. Building on this in a later investigation of social suffering in contemporary society Bourdieu (1999, pp.127-128) states that a low level of cultural capital ‘chains one to a place’ as disadvantaged people can perceive that they do not have the necessary ‘tacitly required’ cultural capital to engage in cultural activities out with familiar class and geographical confines, resulting in a negative impact on both the orientation towards participation and ultimately the action of participating in cultural activities.

#### *2.4.3.4 The Deficit Model*

The deficit model implies that the lower classes have ‘the wrong values and attitudes’ towards culture evidenced by their failure to participate in ‘legitimate’ culture, a deficiency which can only be rectified via strategies designed to ‘help, cajole or coerce...into the mainstream’ (Levitas, 2004, p.47). The underlying assumption of this model reinforces hierarchical levels of cultural value by legitimating what is perceived to be good and bad, promoting amongst disadvantaged individuals what Bourdieu described as symbolic violence ‘the process through which the socially dominated devalue their own tastes, preferences, lifestyle capacities, or whole habitus’ due to a socially mandated need to revere ‘dominant cultural forms and ways of being’ (Prieur & Savage, 2011, p.570). By defining participation in terms of engagement with ‘legitimate’ culture, the deficit model

negates the value of other modes of cultural participation and marginalises the ‘otherized cultural capital’ which they generate. Furthermore, the deficit model provides the rationale for an ‘unhelpful’ cultural policy agenda which not only perpetuates the legitimisation of high-status culture via the ‘redistribution of resources upwards, towards those who are already most privileged’, but crucially classifies as ‘excluded’ those who do not display ‘a particular set of tastes and practices’ (Miles & Sullivan, 2012, p.321)

#### *2.4.3.5 The role of cultural capital in social exclusion & social inclusion*

Cultural capital theory is increasingly being applied to discussions of both social exclusion and inclusion. This duality can be explained by traditional definitions of cultural capital as a power conferring asset obtainable only by the elite which acts as a root cause of exclusion resulting for many in an ‘inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life’ (Duffy, 1995, as cited in Birdi et al., 2008, p.577). In contrast contemporary definitions of cultural capital which recognise the potential of cultural participation to act as ‘an instrument or contributory agent for change’ with the ability to improve ‘the quality of life of a person and his/her community’ (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke, 2014, p.54), see cultural capital as a route towards inclusion which is open to all. Whilst on the surface it would appear that this is a positive shift in focus, it could be argued ‘Because the inclusion/exclusion discourse now focuses primarily on the poorest groups, it obscures the position of the rich and the means by which they maintain power and privilege’ (Levitas, 2004, p.48), which is the exact opposite of what Bourdieu was trying to accomplish with the concept of cultural capital.

### 2.4.4 Cultural Capital and Libraries

#### *2.4.4.1 Introduction*

Williams (1988, p.91) defined culture as ‘a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development...and... the works and practices which represent and sustain it’. This definition helps to clarify the concept of cultural capital as representing something which is created via the interactions between individuals, communities, and objects. Notions of value attributed to these interactions are what defines culture as constituting a form of capital. In this sense Bourdieu’s (1984) 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. Contemporary definitions of cultural capital have moved away from making distinctions between difference and quality, to instead embrace the idea of cultural capital as something which is open to all. This transition from an exclusive to inclusive understanding of culture, has facilitated an alignment of the concept with the modern ethos of the public library service. To date however the concept of cultural capital has not yet sufficiently been addressed within the LIS literature.

#### *2.4.4.2 Definitions of Cultural Capital in the LIS context*

The proliferation of definitions of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, discussed earlier as comprising four key categories- 'Highbrow', 'contextually-valued', 'otherized' and 'Bourdiesian framework', continues within the discipline of LIS. Whilst the potential application of the concept has not yet been realised, of those LIS studies which do refer to and define cultural capital (Savolainen, 1995; Jones, 1998; Goulding, 2008; Ignatow, Webb, Poulin, Parajuli, Fleming, Batra & Neupane, 2012), there exists a range of definitions which encompass the three expressions of cultural capital- institutionalised (ability), embodied (behaviour) and objectified (value). In understanding cultural capital as an ability- rooted in experience (Savolainen, 1995) and enabling action (Goulding, 2008), cultural capital can be defined as a 'set of cultural competencies which a person needs to acquire to participate in a whole range of cultural activities' (Goulding, 2008, p.235) which are 'acquired through education and life experience' (Savolainen, 1995, p.269). An extension to this is highlighted by Jones (1998, p.137) who argues that cultural capital 'involves empathy towards, appreciation for and competence in cultural phenomena and it extends to include how to behave in a culturally acceptable way', which encompasses the ideal that cultural capital is both evidenced and enabled by behaviour. A further public library specific definition rests in the idea that 'the basis of their cultural capital is... objectified cultural capital represented by their collections' (Goulding, 2008, p.236), however only library collections which represent 'forms of cultural knowledge that are scarce and valuable' (Ignatow et al., 2012, p.69) can be regarded as cultural capital.

#### *2.4.4.3 Applications of cultural capital in the public library context*

It has been argued that the ability of public libraries to create cultural capital could be vital to their survival (Baker & Evans, 2011, p.8), however despite this prediction discussions of cultural capital remain largely absent from both academic and professional LIS literature.

Goulding (2008, p.236) has highlighted the potential application of the concept by arguing that as 'library use is accepted as a sign of cultural participation and an indicator of cultural capital...that libraries can be regarded as sites for the production, dissemination and appropriation of cultural capital'. Additionally, that 'facilitating cultural capital may be a means of addressing social exclusion, contributing to social capital and stimulating community engagement' which 'could give an added dimension' to the role of public libraries (Goulding, 2008, p.237). It is in each of these areas that the true potential of cultural capital theory and practice to libraries can be best appreciated. For example, Muddiman et al (2000, p.57) highlighted the need for public library services to 'involve some element of redistribution of material or cultural capital to the excluded and disadvantaged' to enable a 'focus not simply on 'access' but on equalities of outcome as an overarching goal.' This point was echoed by Ignatow et al (2012, p.70) who argues that this can only be achieved if library collections in disadvantaged areas are equivalent in quality to those 'used exclusively by elites, and other private or otherwise exclusive cultural institutions'.

Public libraries would typically be seen as facilitating cultural capital in an objectified sense via library collections which enable a familiarity with objects of cultural significance such as books. However objectified cultural capital is not just to be understood as a tangible quality within the object itself, but rather also the capacity to consume/appreciate/engage with and know the object. For public libraries although they provide access to objectified cultural capital in the sense that they enable people from all walks of life access to cultural objects, this is only half the act of cultural consumption as something more is needed for individuals to be able to fully understand the object. This issue is not just about access provision, but rather enabling accessibility. Libraries need to help people develop the cultural competencies required to fully engage with the resources they provide, via reader development activities which enable and empower this kind of interaction. The concept of cultural capital shines a new light on the core nature of reader development activities in developing the knowledge, skills and education that facilitate cultural participation which are vital to alleviating the digital/social/cultural divides experienced by disadvantaged groups, enabling true access and supporting active engagement.



Goulding (2008, p.236) highlights a key concern with applying Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to modern public libraries- namely 'how comfortably some of his ideas about the value of certain cultural products or forms sit with more recent views about the value of reading, the role and environment of modern libraries and the range of material now available within them'. However, whilst these are valid concerns, and potentially a reason why Bourdieu has not been more widely embraced within the public library context, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital does not propose an intrinsic value within objects, but rather explores the socio-cultural context within which cultural value is attributed. Furthermore, as Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun (1993, p.33) argue cultural capital 'does not seek- nor can it account for- cultural forms or the power that they exert over agents through their meaningfulness'. This viewpoint is supported by Sullivan (2001) who proposes Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory as a means of understanding the value of various cultural forms on an individualistic basis, as opposed to via higher/lower distinctions.

To date cultural capital has been briefly mentioned in the public library context in relation to issues of social inclusion (Muddiman et al, 2000), social justice (Ignatow et al., 2012) and library use (Japzon & Gong, 2005). The Japzon & Gong (2005) study unintentionally draws attention to what may be a significant problem in terms of determining and recognising cultural capital within LIS literature as in a subsequent article (Gong, Japzon & Chen, 2008, p.66) argues in relation to the 2005 study that it 'analysed in detail the human, economic and cultural capitals traditionally considered in library studies' despite the term cultural capital actually only being applied in the final sentence of the article with Bourdieu not included in the list of references. So, whilst there may exist a wealth of material which demonstrates the positive development of both individual and collective cultural capital by public libraries, the failure to utilise and define the term represents a missed opportunity to advocate a key benefit of libraries within disadvantaged communities. This can be appreciated when contrasted with the increasing strategic application of social capital within the LIS context and the extent to which this has raised the profile of publics by closely aligning them with a contemporary political priority.

#### *2.4.4.4 Relevance of the concept to Public Libraries*

The concept of cultural capital highlights that an individuals' 'ability to enjoy or engage with cultural activities has a direct bearing on their place within society' (Goulding 2008, p.235).

For socially excluded groups, disadvantaged by an 'inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life' (Duffy, 1995, as cited in Birdi et al., 2008, p.577), the pursuit of cultural capital could provide a route to cultural engagement. Research has evidenced the benefits of cultural participation both to the individual in terms of increased happiness and personal enrichment (Kim & Kim, 2009) good health and satisfaction with life (Leadbetter & O'Connor, 2013) and collectively within communities in relation to social cohesion (Jeannotte, 2003) and neighbourhood regeneration (Bridge, 2006). Cultural participation has the potential to act as a 'contributory agent for change... improving the quality of life of a person and his/her community' (Vermeersch & Vandenbroucke, 2014, p.54). However, cultural participation levels remain markedly lower amongst socially excluded groups (Leadbetter & O'Connor, 2013; Myerscough, 2011; Warwick Commission 2015; Scottish Government, 2016). For community based cultural institutions like public libraries viewing the services they provide through the theoretical lens of cultural capital, could provide an enhanced understanding of some of the barriers to and benefits of library engagement.

Whilst 'It is not possible, in the end .... to find one universal solution for all excluded communities' (Muddiman et al, 2000, p.66 cited in McMenemy, 2009, p.54) to the diverse range of barriers to library engagement, a dual focus on the socio-cultural role of public libraries as facilitators of social as well as cultural capital could enhance community engagement by stimulating cultural participation. Socially inclusive public libraries focused on promoting the broadening of social networks (Spink & Cole, 2006, p.96) within socially excluded communities, can contribute to the alleviation of social fragmentation (Birdi et al., 2008) by providing services 'offering an intellectual and social element' (McMenemy, 2009, p.199). The provision of cultural services such as book groups and writing groups with a social element as a key component, can help public libraries to transform, enrich and empower socially excluded communities as 'When public libraries promote 'complex culture', they contribute to the public good' (Usherwood, 2007, p.36). For public libraries, the concept of cultural capital could provide a tool with which to better understand the qualitative impact of library enabled cultural engagement to individuals and communities.

## 2.4.5 The influence of Bourdieusian theory within LIS Research

### *2.4.5.1 Introduction*

To date within Library and Information Science (LIS) there has been limited application of the key concepts of capital, habitus, doxa, field, practice and reproduction which comprise Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical oeuvre. Authors such as Savolainen (1999, p.18) have highlighted 'problems in the 'translation' of Bourdieu's concepts into the vocabulary of LIS', which perhaps explains why Bourdieusian theory has not gained the same traction within LIS as it has across a host of other related disciplines. The concept of cultural capital constitutes part of a large intertwined theoretical framework, the full intricacies of which bolster the concept of cultural capital providing both context and clarification. As a result, to best consider the application of the concept of cultural capital in the public library context, it is necessary to address the extent to which Bourdieu's related concepts have (and have not) been addressed in the LIS literature.

### *2.4.5.2 Libraries & Social Capital*

The most notable omission of Bourdieu from the LIS literature can be appreciated in the widespread application in relation to public libraries of the concept of social capital- a concept widely credited to the work of Bourdieu (1977), Coleman (1985) and Putnam (1993). For Bourdieu social capital was a resource, as with other forms of capital, which the elite were able to exploit to their advantage. As a result, it has been argued that Bourdieu's theory of social capital did not recognise that 'less privileged individuals and groups might also find benefit in their social ties' (Field, 2008, p.22). Coleman argued however that whilst social capital did ensure that 'the powerful remained powerful by virtue of their contacts with other powerful people' (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000, p.6) that social capital could also be evidenced in the positive social relations within rich and poor neighbourhoods and so 'also convey real benefits to poor and marginalised communities' (Field, 2008, p.23). Putnam went further conceptualising social capital as a 'sociological WD-40' which arises from 'associational activity that brings relative strangers together...helping to build and sustain a wider set of networks and values that foster general reciprocity and trust, and in turn facilitate mutual collaboration' (Field, 2008, p.35-36).

The key differences between the three theories of social capital are that Bourdieu perceived social capital as something primarily of benefit to the individual (Svendsen, 2013), whilst

Coleman highlighted both the individual benefit and the wider unintended collective value arising from an individuals' pursuit of social capital, and for Putnam the strength of social capital rests in the collective as opposed to individual benefits it brings. Putnam is widely credited as raising the profile of the concept of social capital (Schuller et al, 2000) and providing the most common definition of the term applied in both 'Societal' & 'Institutional' contexts which recognise the role of civic activity, evidenced in participation and provision, as a means of generating social capital (Varheim, 2009). The LIS literature on the relationship between public libraries and social capital has been 'strongly inspired' by Putnam (Svendsen, 2013), Coleman's influence being observed to a lesser extent and Bourdieu largely absent from the LIS social capital literature (Kranich, 2001; Goulding, 2004; Audunson, Essmat & Aabo, 2011; Varheim, 2011; Ferguson, 2012; Johnson & Griffis, 2014; Ferguson, 2012; Varheim, 2014). Of those LIS studies which do briefly discuss Bourdieu's theory of social capital (Varheim, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Leith, 2013) this is listed alongside other forms of capital (Elbeshausen & Skov, 2004; Hillenbrand, 2005; Japzon & Gong, 2005; Gong et al., 2008; Svendsen, 2013; Miller, 2014; Griffis & Johnson, 2014) with limited exploration of the relationship between social capital and cultural capital (Ignatow et al., 2012).

#### *2.4.5.3 The library role in cultural reproduction*

Although rarely mentioned specifically by Bourdieu, it could be argued that public libraries play a key role in the cultural reproduction of societies. Public libraries unlike many other cultural institutions are situated at the heart of communities, used by people from all walks of life in the course of their everyday lives. They are widely regarded as trusted, safe spaces which offer a range of educational, social, leisure, cultural and practical services. The idea of trust in relation to a public institution such as a library or a school or a hospital, recognises that as a society we have faith in the quality of service they provide and defer to them the power to make decisions which we recognise that they have the requisite knowledge and ability to make. As cultural intermediaries, public librarians both satisfy and shape the tastes of the communities they serve. The decision to make certain items as opposed to others available in libraries recognises the legitimacy of the item (Bouthillier, 2000), conferring a mark of quality which is guaranteed by the socially recognised cultural capital of the library. As a result, collection development policies which endeavour 'to make the

public library a mirror of the society which they would like to see' (Baker & Evans 2011, p.72) as opposed to reflecting diverse cultural viewpoints can 'contribute to the legitimacy of a cultural orthodoxy' (Budd 2003, p.22).

#### 2.4.5.4 *Librarian doxa/ Library habitus*

The concept of doxa defined by Bourdieu (2000, p.16) as 'a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma' can be applied to professions which have a consensus of thought as to the inherent personal qualities and work ethic, as opposed to the practical skills, needed by practitioners to fulfil the role. In the field of librarianship this is particularly true with there being an interesting dynamic between the stereotype of what a librarian is (quiet, bookish, helpful cat loving, and cardigan wearing middle aged woman) with the professional doxa of what a public librarian should believe in (e.g., libraries as a social necessity, free services available to all, the power of reading, the enlightening mission of libraries). Whilst public librarians may well embody or wish to embody the increasingly popular kitsch stereotype, not doing so would not be career suicide. However, given that the librarian's doxa 'is simultaneously the force which creates solidarity within the field at the same time creating a defence against those elements which threaten from outside' (Rasmussen & Jochumsen, 2003, p.86) to oppose the prevalent ideology within the profession, could result in a perception of being an 'outsider' as opposed to 'insider'. Furthermore Jones (1998, p.138) has identified a 'considerable conflict' between the librarian doxa which drives the library profession and the realities of the library habitus, which can be subject to external influence not in line with the doxa of the profession.

The habitus enables both internalisation and mediation of the doxic beliefs of society, orientating behaviour in accordance with the 'reciprocal relationship between the ideas and attitudes of individuals and the structures within which they operate' (Wolfreys, 2000). In the context of public libraries, the librarian's doxa provides the rules which shape library practice. The idea of a library habitus defined as 'a set of practices, or dispositions to practice, that identify librarians and by which librarians identify themselves' (Budd 2003, p.28) should be of widespread LIS interest, particularly in line with an increasing professional need to demonstrate a process of personal and professional reflection.

However, Budd's article is alone in appreciating the potential application of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, in addition to his belief in the importance of reflexivity. The failure of the library profession to shift focus from practice to praxis, illuminates a key reason why Bourdieu's concepts have not gained hold in librarianship. Bourdieu's theories oppose the librarian doxa, which inherently perceives only the good libraries can do without appreciating the extent to which 'librarianship creates and maintains differences among classes of people' (Budd, 2003, p.29).

#### *2.4.5.5 The Digital Divide*

Whilst the impact of the digital divide has been an area of specific interest in the LIS literature, there have been limited attempts to apply key Bourdieusian concepts such as reproduction (Kvasny, 2006), capital (North, Snyder & Bulfin, 2008) and habitus (Robinson, 2009) to this area. Kvasny (2006, p.160) in a case study of a US community technology initiative (comparable to the availability of pcs and computer classes in UK public libraries) draws a distinction between the digital divide understood simply as access to digital resources and digital inequality as 'access to and use of ICT' and 'the ways in which longstanding social inequities shape beliefs and expectations regarding ICT and its impacts on life chances'. Kvasny (2006, p.160) found that participants taking part in free ICT classes did so in the belief that obtaining these skills would help them to 'overcome their material deprivation' and felt a sense of 'despair' as they progressed, realising that the basic ICT skills they were learning were 'limited'. This study highlights the extent to which the various socioeconomic problems faced by disadvantaged groups 'shape diffusion rates and patterns of use that can mirror and reinforce social inequities rather than mitigate them' (Kvasny, 2006, p.161).

Building on the work of Kvasny (2006), North et al (2008) investigated the impact of the family habitus and cultural capital on young peoples' use of ICT. The authors found that 'Habitus grounds young peoples' digital tastes and these tastes are expressed in the cultural forms of ICT young people use' (North et al., 2008, p.899). The ways in which various technologies are used by parents in both advantaged and disadvantaged homes, provides a model for young people who reproduce their parents' attitudes towards ICT as being a tool for recreation or study. This can be a source of educational advantage for those young people whose 'ICT practices in their home environment... mirror practices in school' (North

et al., 2008, p.908). Furthermore, as patterns of ICT use in the home can negatively shape disadvantaged young peoples' attitude towards ICT use, so to can the absence of ICT in the home. Robinson (2009, p.491-492) examines the extent to which the quality of internet access in the home impacts on the attitudes towards internet use, characterising young people with low quality internet access as adopting a 'task orientated view of internet use in contrast to those with high quality internet access who displayed a 'playful or exploratory stance towards online information seeking'. The former 'information habitus' comparable to Bourdieu's theory of the choice of the necessary, and the later 'information habitus' to current cultural omnivore interpretations of cultural capital theory which are typified by a similar inclusive approach to culture.

#### 2.4.5.6 *Conclusion*

In conclusion despite Budd (2003, p.21) arguing that 'There is quite a lot in Bourdieu's writings that our profession should pay attention to', the potential enrichment of LIS through the utilisation of concepts such as capital, field, habitus, practice, doxa and reproduction has not yet been realised. The application of Bourdieusian theory which does exist within LIS, in relation to issues of professional and practical public library interest such as social exclusion, community impact, cultural engagement, the digital divide, and cultural competence of the profession, provides useful insight from which to better understand some of the barriers to and benefits of public library engagement amongst disadvantaged groups. However additional work is needed within LIS to define the concept, determine the indicators, and demonstrate the contemporary relevance of cultural capital. This would provide a basis from which the specific public library mechanisms for the creation of cultural capital and competencies (Goulding, 2008) could be identified and the impact of this to individuals and communities best appreciated.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the library role in address issues of cultural divide by reviewing literature in three areas: public libraries (historic and current practice), information behaviour (influencing sociocultural factors) and cultural capital (definition and application in relation to educational and social inequality, relevance of the concept and influence of wider Bourdieusian theory to libraries). The researcher identified that contemporary public

library practice, underpinned by a professional commitment to reader development, extends beyond solely providing access to cultural resources to encompass an outward facing approach focused on increasing their accessibility within communities. The shift from 'collection to connection' (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016) represented an increasingly participatory cultural role for public libraries. Next exploring theories of information behaviour, the researcher found that participatory activities in which the library provided a place for interaction and connection could generate various benefits, however factors such as perception, norms, preferences, and literacy could present barriers to connecting with library services within disadvantaged communities. Lastly by examining diverse interpretations and applications of cultural capital, the researcher found that contemporary issues of cultural divide were characterised by differences in cultural behaviours as opposed to taste preferences, with those from disadvantaged communities least likely to participate in cultural activities. Barriers to cultural participation such as education, environment and encouragement corresponded with those identified in information behaviour literature. Further the researcher identified an inclusive direction for the concept within the literature, which regarded cultural capital as something which could be developed, aligning the concept with the empowering ethos of public library provision.

Following completion of the literature review, the researcher concluded that existing cultural capital research was limited by an emphasis on the role of the home and school in the generation of cultural capital and an adherence to hierarchical notions of cultural value which focus on the what, as opposed to why of cultural consumption and participation. The researcher hypothesised that this dual focus had led researchers to overlook the potential illumination of the concept which could be achieved by considering what culture means to people and what significance cultural practices, objects and places play in the everyday lives of individuals within areas of multiple deprivations. Further the researcher identified the potential significance of libraries as places for participation in addressing issues of cultural divide and the need for empirical research investigating how public libraries enable and encourage cultural engagement in disadvantaged communities. A dual research focus exploring both the types of library activities which overcome diverse barriers to cultural participation and the experiences of and impact on individuals participating, would address



identified gaps in the literature by evidencing the contemporary cultural role of libraries. Further a research focus on group activities involving a social element would provide additional insight into the library role in facilitating social interaction and fostering social connection through offering opportunities for routine cultural participation which animate libraries.

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

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## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

To investigate the impact of libraries as places for participation in addressing issues of cultural divide, the researcher sought to design an empirical component which would evidence the types of library activities which stimulate cultural participation and the experiences of and impact on individuals participating. The researcher believed this would address identified gaps in the literature by generating empirically informed insight of the drivers and barriers to cultural participation, the meanings and motivations associated with participatory group activity, and the social and cultural role of public libraries. This chapter outlines the methodological considerations which influenced the researcher's approach, strategy, design, and methods selection (3.2), details the criteria used to identify a research environment for fieldwork and how methods were applied to collect data (3.3), the ethical process followed (3.4), and how collected data was analysed to identify themes (3.5).

The empirical component of this study investigated the following research questions:

**Question 1:** What are the key drivers and barriers to cultural participation within areas of multiple deprivations and which public library activities and resources could be best utilised to address issues of cultural divide?

**Question 2:** What is the public library role in stimulating and strengthening social connection amongst individuals, groups, and communities? Does this provide a third route to the development of cultural capital?

**Question 3:** What constitutes 'engagement' in the cultural context? What is the public library role in encouraging and enabling cultural engagement within areas of multiple deprivations, how can this be evidenced and used to demonstrate impact and advocate value?

### **3.2 Methodological Considerations**

#### **3.2.1 Approach**

Bryman (2012, p.7) argues that designing and conducting research cannot be 'hermetically sealed off from wider influences' such as the researcher's ontological and epistemological positions. Ontology 'embodies understanding *what is*' whereas 'epistemology tries to

understand *what it means to know*' (Gray, 2014, p.19) therefore research is not 'neutral' (Bryman, 2012, p.19) as what the researcher believes can be understood about the world will influence what knowledge they believe can be obtained and how this can be done. Constructivist approaches to the study of culture recognise the role of the social world in 'shaping perspectives' but argue that it constitutes 'a point of reference' as opposed to an 'external' and 'totally constraining' force as with objectivist ontologies (Bryman, 2012, p.34). Approaching the concept of cultural capital from a constructionist perspective in which 'meaning is constructed in and through interaction' of individuals (Bryman, 2012, p.34), represents a shift away from 'deterministic' critiques of the concept (Jeannotte, 2003, p.39), by focusing on how cultural capital can be developed independently of external and constraining factors such as upbringing and education.

A constructionist ontology is 'closely linked with' an interpretivist epistemology (Gray, 2014, p.23), which focuses on 'the interpretive understanding of social action' from the perspective of the individuals involved (Bryman, 2012, p.29). There are several examples of interpretivist approaches, of which the researcher predominantly aligned with symbolic interactionism, reflecting a belief that perceptions are not fixed but are responsive to interaction and experience (Gray, 2014, p.24). The researcher believed symbolic interactionism to be particularly relevant to issues of cultural consumption and participation, providing a theoretical foundation from which to understand the influential role of an individuals' sense of self on how they perceive cultural objects, institutions, and activities. Halas (2004, p.235) has argued that whilst Bourdieusian theory provides 'many convergent points of view with the symbolic interactionists' perspective' the main difference is that Bourdieu fails to sufficiently address notions of 'the individual self'. In existing cultural capital research, approaches which rely on quantitative methodologies are ill equipped to address this omission as they fail to adequately capture the perspectives of individuals for whom Bourdieu's concept by focusing on a dependant relationship with habitus, does not recognise their agency to personally develop cultural capital in opposition to the habitus of their class.

### 3.2.2      Strategy

The literature review identified the need for research investigating the library role in stimulating cultural engagement and supporting the development of cultural capital,

through the provision of participatory group activities. The researcher determined that an empirical component which explored the cultural and social aspects of participation by qualitatively examining the importance of motivation and meaning, as opposed to a quantitative focus on frequency and variety, would best achieve this objective. A qualitative approach was selected as qualitative research is most suited to capturing 'the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and social processes in the particular contexts which they occur' (Jupp, 2006, p.249). Furthermore, the researcher hypothesized that a qualitative approach to researching cultural capital could enable a richer 'synergistic' exploration of the concept when considered alongside existing quantitative cultural capital research which operationalises the concept as a source of power. By adopting a qualitative approach to reduce the 'power gap' between researchers and participants (Kumar, 2014, p.133) and sensitising the concept as a resource, this research strategy represents a departure from the mutually reinforcing relationship between understanding and approach which foreground issues of power, predominantly associated with the research of cultural capital.

In research involving grand theories and abstract concepts such as cultural capital deductive approaches are predominantly employed to enable the concept to be operationalised, with quantitative methodologies utilised to test a hypothesis and evidence whether an effect has taken place (Bryman, 2012). However, to date cultural capital has been largely absent from the LIS literature and in disciplines where the concept has been extensively researched there exists no 'consensus on what cultural capital means, whether it has an effect and what that effect is' (Dumais, 2002, p.49). As a result, to explore the concept of cultural capital in the public library context the researcher adopted a grounded approach, combining both induction and deduction. By 'remaining open to new ideas and concepts' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.40) throughout the research process, the researcher believed a grounded approach would aid the development of theory (Bendassolli, 2013). Furthermore by 'sensitizing' the concept to provide a 'general sense of reference and guidance' (Blumer, 1954, p.7 as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.388) as opposed to operationalising the concept to test for fixed pre-determined indicators, the researcher believed that 'theory and categorization' would 'emerge out of the collection and analysis of data' (Bryman, 2012, p.384).

### 3.2.3      Design

Building on considerations of research approach and strategy, is the need to develop a research design which ‘provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data’ (Bryman, 2012, p.46). Survey research designs utilising quantitative methods have predominantly been used to both research cultural capital and to establish satisfaction levels with public library services. However, as Gray (2014, p.267) argues whilst a survey design is optimal for establishing the ‘what’, ‘who’ and ‘where’ of the quantifiable such as cultural consumption and participation, it fails to capture the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the qualitative such as cultural engagement. Qualitative case studies enable an issue to be viewed through ‘a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood’ (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.544). Gray (2014, p.269) argues that a case study design can be particularly beneficial in theory development in research studies which aim to generate ‘fresh perspectives’ into ‘well known’ research areas. Therefore, given the focus of this study, on exploring the relationship between the ‘phenomenon’ of cultural engagement and the ‘context’ of public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations (Gray, 2014, p.267), a qualitative case study design was selected. The researcher believed this would provide a ‘holistic’ mechanism of understanding the connections between the ‘relationships and processes within social settings’ (Denscombe, 2007, p.36) such as public libraries, which can encourage and enable cultural engagement.

The researcher anticipated that cultural engagement in the library context, understood as sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by, could be evidenced via ‘a detailed examination’ of group activities in public libraries (Gray, 2014, p.266 summarising Tight 2010). As public libraries represent multipurpose community hubs which offer a range of practical, educational, cultural, and leisure services, the researcher believed that not all library users could be assumed to be consuming, participating, or engaged by cultural objects, activities, or practices. In contrast, the researcher hypothesised that members of library groups could provide a ‘meticulous view’ of the experience of being an ‘engaged’ library user (Seale, 2012, p.216) as membership of a group constituted an ‘active, purposive, and meaning-laden involvement’ (Susen, 2016, p.459) with public libraries. To generate depth of insight of the shared aspects of participation, the researcher selected an instrumental comparative

case study design (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012, p.246) encompassing a representative range of typical library group activities which they 'considered to be examples of the same type of case sharing common characteristics' (Lapan et al, 2012, p.247).

The researcher selected six library group activities as cases, with each case 'limited' (Lapan, et al, p.248) to participant perspectives and experiences, as opposed to library staff input, to facilitate an enhanced understanding of the motivations, barriers and drivers to, benefits of, and meaning derived from participation as understood by library users. The researcher's decision to select a cohort sample of 'individuals who share a similar characteristic or experience' (Seale, 2012, p.124) necessitated a longitudinal element to the case study design, as data must be collected 'in at least two waves on the same variables on the same people' (Bryman, 2012, p.63). This was deemed appropriate as in qualitative research incorporating a longitudinal element in the research design can provide a mechanism of better understanding the perspectives of participants than could be achieved via a cross-sectional design which provides only one interaction opportunity with a participant.

A further consideration in a case study design is whether the location in which the research is conducted 'provides a backdrop to the findings' or a 'focus of interest in its own right' (Bryman, 2012, p.68). In the spirit of researchers such as Elfreda Chatman, who 'consider 'place' as an intrinsic part of context' (Spink & Cole, 2006, p.96), the library branches and the communities they serve selected as research sites for this study provided a 'focus' as opposed to a 'backdrop'. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that this study is part of commissioned research to understand the contemporary role of Glasgow's public libraries in generating cultural capital, no stipulation was provided as to how the concept should be sensitised or where the research would be conducted. The researcher hypothesised that understanding the perspectives of library users who are culturally engaged within areas of Glasgow where income and education levels are low, could be achieved by exploring the varying ways in which public library groups can provide a catalyst for stimulating cultural engagement within those communities. The researcher believed that depth and breadth of insight could be achieved via exploring a varied range of groups activities and adopting a multi-site approach incorporating a broad range of libraries located in areas of multiple deprivations, as opposed to a detailed ethnographic study of a single activity, library, or

area. The researcher focused on library branches within areas of multiple deprivations, as recent reports have found that individuals with the lowest incomes (Leadbetter & O'Connor, 2013) and/or education levels (Myerscough, 2011) are least likely to participate in cultural activities within Scotland.

### 3.2.4      Methods

To better understand how public libraries can provide a catalyst for stimulating cultural engagement, the researcher anticipated that library group members could provide 'authentic data' on this issue derived from their pre-existing 'positive relationships' (Agosto & Hughes-Hassel, 2005, p.144) with public library services. The researcher determined that utilising two qualitative methods: participant observation and semi-structured interviews in combination would generate empirically informed insight of the library role in enriching and enabling cultural engagement within areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow. The qualitative methods selected align with earlier discussions regarding research approach, strategy, and design as:

- Participant Observation is an appropriate method in studies seeking to illuminate the understanding of social worlds from an 'insider' as opposed to 'outsider' perspective (Jupp, 2006, p.215)
- Semi-Structured interviews are well suited to those who wish to understand the perspectives of participants in their own words with the flexibility of open questions in qualitative interviews enabling a more meaningful exploration of a participants' perspectives than closed questions in a survey. (Seale, 2012, p.212)

The combination of 'complimentary' research methods was selected as the researcher felt that they would work well together, with each method providing an opportunity to generate illuminating data via the unique strengths of the method in both comparison to and in collaboration with the other selected. Research methods, such as interviews work well when used to 'supplement observation methods, allowing researcher to elicit information or explore attitudes that are not easily accessible through observation alone' (Seale, 2012, p.234). For example, in Goulding's (2009) research which utilised both observation and interviews of museum visitors, she found that interviews provided a mechanism of gathering data on motivations, expectations and perceptions which had not been possible



via observation alone (Goulding, 2009 as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.572). Further participant observation when conducted prior to interviews in public library settings, was found by Prigoda & McKenzie (2007) to be helpful in developing interview questions based upon their observations and by Brewster (2014) in recruiting participants for subsequent interviews.

Participant observation and face to face semi-structured interviews were selected as research methods for this study, to enable multiple opportunities for interaction between the researcher and participants. Information ground theory has found that social interaction can result in the sharing of information in spontaneous and serendipitous ways. In applying the concept of information grounds to the practice of exploratory research, the researcher believed that utilising research methods which enable social interaction would aid the data collection process due to the rapport developed between researcher and participants. As understanding the role of social interaction in the development and diffusion of cultural capital is of interest to this study, the researcher believed that observing and interviewing members of library groups, which enable and encourage interaction, were appropriate methods of data collection.

#### *3.2.4.1 Participant Observation*

Participant observation is 'the most common component' of the 'cocktails of methodologies' which comprise ethnography (Jupp, 2006, p.101), with ethnographic approaches particularly useful in 'discovering the relationship between culture and behaviour' (Gray, 2014, p.17). Jupp (2006, p.215) has argued that 'understandings of social worlds can be enhanced by observing, experiencing and talking to others in the field' with the 'closeness' achieved via an active participation in the field facilitating an improved understanding of the perspectives of participants by the researcher (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p.1). Therefore, the researcher selected participant observation as a suitable research method for this study as they believed it would provide the foundation from which 'a better understanding of insiders from their own perspective' (Baker, 2006, p.187) would be developed. Whilst producing a 'traditional' ethnography 'involving a period of prolonged participant observation in a social setting' (Bryman, 2012, p.464) was beyond the scope of this study, the researcher was committed to developing 'an insider's perspective' (Gray, 2014, p.439) concerning the experience of and meanings associated with

membership of library groups. Given the focus of the study on library group activities, of which with the exception of bounce and rhyme the researcher had no prior experience of as a member or session leader, the researcher believed that actively participating in groups and observing participants would best enable them to achieve this objective.

The researcher believed that undertaking a short period of participant observation would provide a foundational first step in the empirical component, facilitating familiarisation with different types of library group activities, library locations and library group members. The researcher anticipated that observing groups would provide an introductory opportunity to interact with participants over a shared experience which would build trust and rapport whilst enhancing the researcher's understanding of each activity. Participant observation was not selected to serve as a primary data collection method for this study, but rather to support subsequent collection and analysis of interview data via aiding recruitment whilst providing context and insight. Corbin & Strauss (2008, p.29-30) highlight that participant observation can capture the 'subtleties of what goes on in interactions' which the participants themselves may be unaware of or be unable to explain. Whilst Gray (2014, P413) argues that 'observation provides an opportunity to get beyond people's opinions and self-interpretations of their attitudes and behaviours, towards an evaluation of their actions in practice'. Therefore, the researcher anticipated that observation data when triangulated with data gathered from interviews, an additional qualitative method, would generate a holistic understanding and 'authoritative account' (Bryman, 2012, p.462) of the experiences and perspectives of culturally engaged library users.

Participation observation has been utilised within qualitative research in varying degrees ranging in nature and intensity of participation from 'covert full member' to 'non-participating observer with Interaction' (Bryman, 2012, p.441-444). McKechnie (2000, p.72) used 'unobtrusive' participation observation in combination with parent diaries and recording children's library conversations to create 'a detailed, rich picture' of the public library use of preschool girls which reflected 'the perspective of the children themselves'. This approach contrasted with that of Bedwell & Banks (2013, p.1) who adopted a more active but covert level of participant observation to 'see through the eyes of students' in academic libraries. The researcher, a librarian, recruited students to observe other students

in the library to ensure 'unobtrusive access' and the 'richness of collected data... enhanced by observer insight'. In related research Mackellar (2013, p.56) applied participant observation in a festival setting to study the interactions between festival goers to better understand audiences and the 'affective dimensions of their behaviour', whilst Gregory (2008, p.63) conducted participant observation at poetry slam events whilst researching the 'sustainability' of cultural capital in a changing cultural landscape.

The researcher believed that participant observation would provide an appropriate method for this study, given the successful utilisation of the method in a range of research projects, within and outwith LIS, exploring similar types of group activities focused on in this study. For example, in research exploring library group literacy activities for young children (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009) and adult learners (Elbeshausen, 2007) participant observation was deployed to better understand both the activities themselves and the experiences of participants. For Elbeshausen (2007, p.100) participant observation was used as part of a 'multiple research design' to provide additional insight into learning activities as part of an ethnographic approach encompassing interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. Whilst Stooke & McKenzie (2009, p.672), in their observational study of early literacy programs, used participant observation as a primary method of data collection as they believed that 'leisure experiences are produced in the ongoing interactions among participants and leaders, and that observing those interactions in program sites can provide clues to understanding how leisurely experiences are produced'. Further in a related study of public library knitting groups Prigoda & McKenzie (2007, p.96) argue that as participant observers, researchers can 'participate first-hand' in the behaviours of the group 'rather than solely relying on the memories and descriptive abilities of participants in interviews' whilst also learning 'not only through observing, but also through direct contact with fellow participants and the expertise shared'.

#### *3.2.4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviewing is a research method commonly used with both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. However, whereas quantitative approaches are predominantly structured, formal and involve 'little interaction' with participants, qualitative approaches are less structured, informal and enable more 'purposeful conversations' (Jupp, 2006, p.157). Kumar

(2014, p.182) argues that interviewing is the 'most appropriate approach for studying complex and sensitive areas' and 'collecting in-depth information', as the researcher can 'prepare' participants for delicate questions, 'explain' or 'repeat' questions to ensure comprehension and also use additional 'probing' questions to obtain more detail or clarification from participants. Further Gray (2014, p.383) recommends that interviewing is a suitable research method where there 'is the intent to understand the lived experiences of other people, and the meaning they make of that experience' (Gray, 2014, p.383). As this was a key objective of this study, the researcher determined that interviewing members of public library groups would best generate insight into how a participant 'frames and understands' their engagement with public libraries (Bryman, 2012, p.471).

Within qualitative research there are a range of interview styles, varying in 'flexibility' and 'specificity' (Kumar, 2014, p.177), of which the researcher selected a semi-structured approach to best support the identification of 'commonalities and differences across individual respondents on one or more topics' (Lapan et al, 2012, p.94). Bryman (2012, p.472) argues that semi-structured interviews are preferable to unstructured interviews when the researcher has both a clear picture of issues they wish to address and where 'cross-case comparability' is required. As the researcher sought to compare the nature, type, levels, and impact of engagement experienced within different communities and enabled by different types of library group activities, the researcher determined this would be best achieved conducting semi-structured interviews utilising a standardised interview schedule across all groups. Further the researcher believed that using an interview schedule would support the validity of the study by ensuring that 'the question content directly concentrates on the research objectives' (Gray, 2014, p.388).

Semi-structured interviews have been found to provide an effective research method within LIS studies researching a broad range of topics: immigrant communities (Sirikul & Dorner, 2016) homelessness outreach (Willett & Broadley, 2011), social capital generation (Miller, 2014; Griffis & Johnson, 2014), library use and non-use (Sbaffi & Rowley, 2015) and community engagement (Sung et al., 2012). The method has been used within LIS and other disciplines to explore group participation in activities of interest to this study. For example, two related qualitative studies focused on walking groups in disadvantaged communities

used semi-structured interviews in different ways with participants, session leaders and stakeholders to generate insight from a range of perspectives. Firstly Hanson, Guell & Jones (2016) used participant generated photos of their walking environment to facilitate 'open-ended, participant driven' discussion and also to guide semi-structured interviews. They found that this approach 'ensured that relevant issues were covered but also enabled probing and development of issues pertinent to each individual and points the participant raised from their photograph' (Hanson, Guell & Jones, 2016, p.28). In a follow up study focused on establishing a walking group from the perspective of organisers and leaders as opposed to participants, Hanson, Cross & Jones (2016, p.79) again used semi-structured interviews creating two separate 'topic guides' one for stakeholders and one for volunteers 'to ensure that' specific areas relevant to each group 'were explored'.

As semi-structured interviews provide a mechanism of 'eliciting rich data on people's views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviours' (Gray, 2014, p.382), the researcher believed that in utilising the method to researching cultural capital, fresh insight would be generated which could support an inclusive understanding and application of the concept in the library context. Silva (2006, p.1185) has compared the application of the dominant quantitative research method of surveys in cultural capital research with the use of semi-structured interviews highlighting that:

'Quantitative research does not say much about the modalities of engagement of the respondents, about their different cultural consumption practices, or the conditions which lead (or led) them to take an interest or have pleasure in the cultural engagement, or what constrained their participation'

Silva (2006, p.1186) goes on to argue that semi-structured interviews provide researchers with the tool to explore these issues. As understanding the modalities and motivations of cultural engagement was foundational to this study, the researcher determined semi-structured interviews would provide a suitable research method.

## 3.3 Data Collection

### 3.3.1 Research Environment

Library group activities and locations were identified by the researcher as sites for data collection using the following inclusion criteria:

- **Relevance**- Library groups operating in Glasgow were grouped into 3 categories: social, developmental, and cultural. Each of these categories represented an area of specific interest to this study as identified via the literature review.
- **Variety**- To represent a broad mix of library groups available in Glasgow 6 different sub types of library groups (knitting, walking, bounce & rhyme, adult literacy & numeracy, creative writing, and book discussion) were selected. Two different locations for each group subtype were included to enable breadth and depth of understanding of cultural capital generation through comparison.
- **Location**- Nine libraries were selected (E1, E2, E3, S1, S2, S3, W1, W2, W3) – with a focus on libraries located in areas of multiple deprivations (<25% most deprived data zones as per the SIMD) and enabling equal representation of each Glasgow Life service area (North-West, South, and North-East).
- **Opportunity**- Three 12-week blocks of fieldwork were planned focused on types of groups (social, cultural, and developmental), as opposed to by service area (North-West, North-East and South) to aid the analysis of data during collection.

The researcher's decision to adopt a grounded theory approach in the research design of this study, influenced the organisation of the fieldwork schedule. The researcher planned three consecutive blocks of fieldwork-one for each identified category of library group (social, cultural, developmental). Beginning with social groups, each planned block comprised of four weeks of observation followed by 8 weeks of interviews to enable the researcher's observations and interpretations, in conjunction with the project literature review, to inform interview questions. In subsequent applications (developmental & cultural groups) this process would then be repeated, and where required refined to inform the next block of fieldwork.

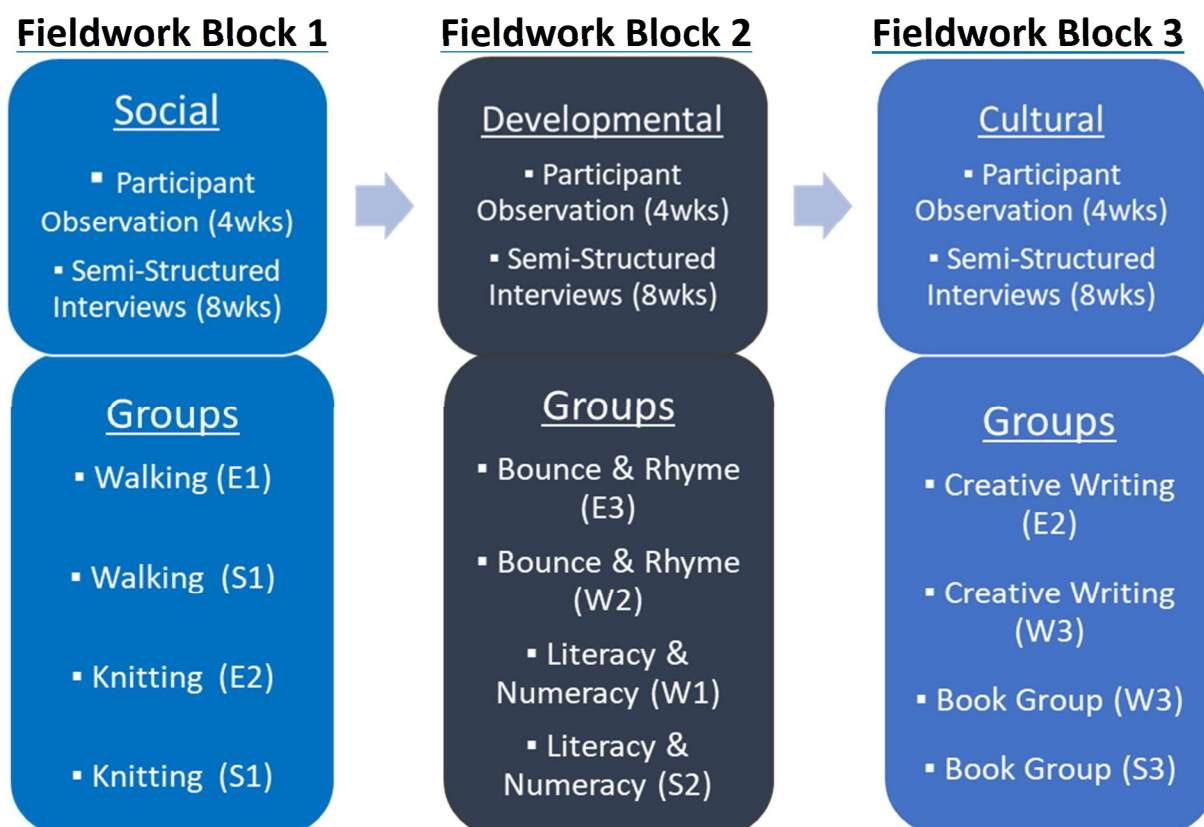


Figure 2: Fieldwork Structure

### 3.3.2 Participant Observation

#### 3.3.2.1 *Planned approach*

The researcher planned to begin each fieldwork block by utilising participant observation as a mechanism of gaining an understanding of the research environment, obtaining contextual research data and building trust and acceptance with participants prior to interview, as opposed to as a primary method of data collection. The researcher believed observing groups on approximately three occasions would be sufficient to achieve these objectives. Further, the researcher anticipated that a relatively short period of immersion in library groups whilst engaging in participant observation, lasting weeks as opposed to a detailed ethnographic study lasting months or years, would limit any potential harm such as ‘anxiety, stress, damage to self-esteem and feelings of guilt or loss of a friendship’ (Gray, 2014, p.453) experienced by participants when the researcher left the field.

Gaining access to an organisation can prove difficult, however the process can be smoother when there exists some pre-existing familiarity with gate keepers (Gray, 2014, p.442). As both a former employee of and undertaking research partially funded by Glasgow Life the

researcher anticipated that this would facilitate gaining initial access to library staff and sites, however, that this pre-existing relationship would not have an impact on securing the co-operation of participants (Bryman, 2012, p.439). When making an initial approach to a library group, the researcher planned to make members aware of their role as a researcher, aims of research study, proposed length of membership, guaranteed anonymity of observations in publications and intention to conduct interviews with some group members post specified observation period. The researcher believed that the research focus, on cultural engagement as opposed to disengagement in the public library context, would motivate participation with group members keen to share their perspectives on a subject that they may be passionate about. Further the researcher hoped that their own approachability and evident combination of personal interest in and empathy (Gray, 2014, p.442) with the research topic derived from prior personal experience as both a user and provider of library services, would be helpful in gaining access to and acceptance by library group members. The researcher anticipated that actively participating in activities during observation would both facilitate the opportunity to interact with participants over a shared experience and enhance their own understanding of each activity.

Field notes are the predominant method used by researchers to record 'detailed' and 'descriptive' observations both during and post interaction, in addition to the researchers own 'personal feelings and experiences' (Jupp, 2006, p.215). For the purposes of this study the researcher planned to record 'jotted notes' such as keywords and phrases whilst in the field, with more detailed notes both on observed events and the researcher's personal reflections and interpretations taken immediately following observation of a library group. These would then be 'weaved together' using an integrative strategy (Emerson et al, 2001, as cited in Gray, 2014, p. 448-449) for inclusion in the thesis. To ensure the descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity of the data (Johnson, 1997 as cited in Baker, 2006, p.186) the researcher planned to: complete detailed descriptive notes immediately after observation when the recollection would be most vivid, include questions based on observation interpretations within subsequent interviews to give participants the opportunity to validate or invalidate the researcher's interpretations and 'examine and explain' the data using a range of applicable theoretical perspectives (Baker, 2006, p.186).



Research participants can often be unintentionally and unexpectedly 'harmed' following the publication of observations, particularly those in which the researcher has failed to sufficiently preserve the anonymity of research location or participants such as Vidich & Bensman's (1968) study of a small US community by (Vidich & Bensman, 1968 as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.136). Although an objective of this research is to evidence the role of public libraries located within areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow in encouraging and enabling cultural engagement, the researcher was committed to ensuring that the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, library groups and venues would be preserved within this study. The researcher planned to achieve this by replacing people and place identifiers, with anonymised alphanumeric pseudonyms in all collected project data. The researcher believed this to be particularly important in the context of this study as for some participants their route to engagement could have been the result of deeply personal experiences which they may wish to remain private.

### *3.3.2.2 Practical Application*

Approval was obtained from Glasgow Life to approach specific groups and locations. To aid the data collection process the researcher decided for each of the six activities (knitting, walking, bounce and rhyme, adult literacy and numeracy, creative writing and reading), to attend two groups operating in different libraries (e.g., two knitting groups in two branches). Prior to the first observation of all twelve groups, the researcher made themselves known to library staff and where appropriate was either introduced by a member of staff or approached groups independently. Group participants were made immediately aware of the researcher's hope to join the group as a participant observer, research focus, objectives, and proposed duration of observation, following which initial verbal consent was requested. Project documentation<sup>1</sup> was distributed as soon as possible after the initial approach, with the researcher purposively limiting intrusion upon the standard flow of each group meeting. Groups were made aware of when the researcher would be leaving the field, both at the beginning of observation and at the last session.

To gain trust and acceptance the researcher actively participated in each of the six group activities, ultimately over the course of three blocks of fieldwork: walking twelve miles,

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<sup>1</sup> Project Documentation included in Appendix 1

reading six books, writing ten short stories, singing over two hundred nursery rhymes, knitting a third of a beginners' basic woollen square and drinking countless cups of tea. Most of the activities were conducive to participant observation, with the exception of both developmental activities: adult literacy and numeracy and bounce and rhyme. The researcher could not be a full participant in these groups as they did not have either developmental need requisite for participation. For example, in bounce and rhyme groups the researcher was not present with a child whose social skills or cognitive abilities they were looking to develop. In these groups the researcher's prior knowledge of the songs and rhymes used by session leaders proved helpful and reduced the gap between the researcher and fellow participants in addition to their sitting on the floor amongst participants as opposed to at the front next to the session leader. In adult literacy and numeracy groups, the researcher worked with participants on written tasks allocated by session leaders and provided help when requested. This approach felt appropriate as given the researcher's own educational background, working on the written tasks independently as a participant with developmental needs could have caused offence. Further giving help was commonplace amongst participants and not limited to session leaders.

Across 12 library groups, 48 group sessions were observed by the researcher. Attendance varied within and across the groups during the observation period, with most of the 12 observed groups consisting of between 5-12 members who attended regularly. Most group activities were held in a designated area of a library, which enabled the researcher to have conversations with or directly observe the majority of those participating. The only exception to this was one walking group, which attracted on average 70 participants per session (however attendance varied weekly from a low of 50 to a high of 100 participants). Participants divided into two groups during the activity- a slow group and a fast group therefore it was not possible for the researcher to observe all participants in this group. Library groups were attended on average on three occasions to facilitate multiple opportunities for interaction with library group members. The researcher observed some groups on more than three occasions where they deemed it appropriate or necessary. For example, in one group following the death of a participant to withdraw as scheduled after three observations would have felt disrespectful to the group and could have unintentionally caused additional harm. In another group where many participants had

physical or mental health concerns to build trust the researcher determined that attending the group for an extra couple of sessions would be most appropriate. Lastly due to the practical difficulties (e.g., childcare considerations) of recruiting new parents for interview and the high frequency of bounce and rhyme sessions operating each week, the researcher chose to observe additional sessions at one branch.

Immediately following observation of each group session, the researcher recorded detailed notes both on observed events and the researcher's personal reflections and interpretations. In total observations of /interactions with 107 library group members were recorded. The researcher had originally planned to record notes such as keywords and phrases whilst in the field, however whilst observing groups felt this would appear unnatural and create an unnecessary distance between the researcher and participants during interactions. The researcher's primary intention with undertaking a period of participant observation was not data collection, however the rich data recorded following 114 hours of observation was subsequently utilised to provide additional context in both the findings and discussion chapters of this thesis. The researcher had planned to revise the interview schedule following observation to include set questions based on observation interpretations, however ultimately determined that the standardised interview schedule devised at the outset of fieldwork would best address the research questions of this study.

### 3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

#### *3.3.3.1 Planned Approach*

The researcher planned to create an interview schedule to guide interview sessions, informed by both observing participants prior to interview (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007) and the literature review. The researcher believed this would support the validity of this study by ensuring that 'the question content directly concentrates on the research objectives' (Gray, 2014, p.388) whilst also giving participants the opportunity to validate the researcher's interpretations of observations. The proposed interview schedule would consist of approximately 6-12 questions (Rowley, 2012) which would be clustered into groups/themes and delivered in a logical (Gray, 2014, p.395) but not fixed order to allow the researcher to be responsive to participant answers by varying the order of questions (Arksey and Knight, 1999, as cited in Gray, 2014, p.395). In addition, interviews would contain a

short quantitative survey element to capture demographic data and explore wider cultural participation beyond the library. A Lickert scale would be used to establish the frequency with which participants visit cultural places, attend cultural events, and participate in cultural activities both alone and with others with these categories drawn from the Scottish Household Survey (Scottish Government, 2016). During completion of the survey component any accompanying qualitative data provided by participants regarding their wider cultural participation would be recorded, analysed, and presented (as per responses to interview questions).

When interviewing museum visitors in Glasgow Jafari, Taheri & Vom Lehn (2013, p.1735) found using general questions as 'ice-breaking tools' helpful in leading into in-depth conversations where informants were being encouraged to provide examples/interesting stories of their experiences. Therefore, the researcher planned, as employed by Brewster (2014, p.96), to begin interview sessions with the question 'what made you decide to be interviewed for this project'. The researcher, informed by the research approach of Daniel, Gutman & Raviv (2011) to the experience of and meanings given to the hobby of cooking, hoped this would then facilitate a broader discussion of the theme of motivations in the cultural context. Daniel et al (2011, p.87) provided an overview of the purpose of the research to participants, before beginning their semi-structured interviews with the question: 'what does cooking do for you, why do you cook?'. They found that beginning with an open-ended question provided a flexible mechanism of enabling participants to identify the meanings they associated with cooking as opposed to respond to pre-existing categories of meaning identified by the researchers. In this study to explore the meanings library group members attach to groups, the researcher planned to ask participants (in the context of knitting groups for example): 'why do you knit? what does knitting do for you'.

Given the exploratory nature of this study and the focus on generating a holistic understanding of the varying ways cultural capital can be developed in the public library context, to facilitate both depth and breadth the researcher planned to conduct a minimum of 12 30-minute interviews per group category (e.g., social) as opposed to group sub-category (e.g. knitting). However, to ensure a representative sample of library group members both by category of group (Social, Developmental, and Cultural), sub-category of

group (e.g walking group, bounce & rhyme, creative writing) and location (North-East, North-West and South) the researcher planned to conduct a minimum of 6 interviews per sub-type of group to achieve data saturation. The researcher’s decision on planned numbers and lengths of interviews was informed by Rowley’s (2012) recommendation that if 12 interviews are conducted an interview duration of 30 minutes is sufficient.

	<b>North-East (E1, E2, E3)</b>	<b>North-West (W1, W2, W3)</b>	<b>South (S1, S2, S3)</b>	<i>Category Total</i>
<b>Fieldwork Block 1: Social</b>				
Walking Group	3-4 Interviews		3-4 Interviews	<i>12-16 Interviews</i>
Knitting Group	3-4 Interviews	3-4 Interviews		
<b>Fieldwork Block 2: Developmental</b>				
Bounce & Rhyme		3-4 Interviews	3-4 Interviews	<i>12-16 Interviews</i>
Literacy & Numeracy	3-4 Interviews		3-4 Interviews	
<b>Fieldwork Block 3: Cultural</b>				
Creative Writing	3-4 Interviews	3-4 Interviews		<i>12-16 Interviews</i>
Book Group		3-4 Interviews	3-4 Interviews	
<b><i>Area Total</i></b>	<i>12-16 Interviews</i>	<i>12-16 Interviews</i>	<i>12-16 Interviews</i>	

Figure 3: Planned Interview Approach

In their original research design investigating the information behaviours of a library based knitting group, Prigoda & Mckenzie (2007, p.97) planned to limit interviews of group members to ‘a smaller, purposive sample’. However, after conducting a preliminary period of participant observation with the group they opted to interview ‘any participants that were willing’, as they felt that limiting interviews could lead to the perception that the ‘contributions’ of some group members were ‘valued over others’. The researcher was committed to ensuring that all groups were evenly represented, however given the significantly large number of groups and sites involved in this study and the limitations of resources in terms of research staff and time, anticipated that it could be necessary to place a limit on the number of members interviewed per group. In the event that all members of a group wished to be interviewed, the researcher planned to sensitively approach the situation by selecting a manageable number of volunteers at random as opposed to purposively selecting specific participants.

The researcher anticipated that ‘building a rapport’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.141) with library group members via participant observation would prove beneficial in both recruiting participants and during interview sessions. This assumption was supported by Brewster’s (2014) finding that undertaking a period of participant observation of a library bibliotherapy group helped in the subsequent recruitment of interview participants. Within each fieldwork block (social, developmental, cultural) the researcher planned to allocate a period of eight weeks following observation within which to conduct semi-structured interviews to ensure all interviews would be transcribed by the researcher during each block. Further the researcher anticipated that an important consideration would be the ability to accommodate participants in the scheduling and organisation of interviews. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995, p.150) suggest that interview participants can feel more relaxed when they have a degree of control over the interview such as selecting a location with which they are familiar. Therefore, the researcher planned to conduct interviews in a convenient well-known public place such as a coffee shop local to the library branch in which a participant’s library group meets.

### 3.3.3.2 Practical Application

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 library group members. An even representation of participants was achieved across both category (social, developmental, cultural) and service area (North-West, North-East, South).

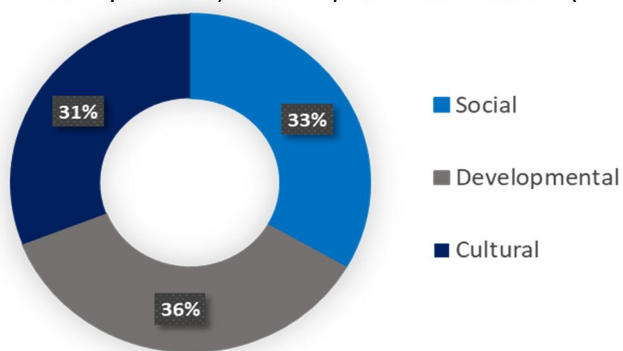


Figure 4: Interview Participants per Category

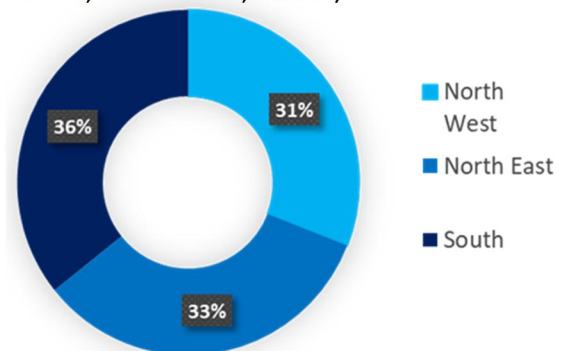


Figure 5: Interview Participants per Area

The researcher had anticipated that building a rapport with participants during observation would have a positive impact on interview recruitment and that they may need to sensitively limit the number of participants interviewed. However, a limit was not required with all participants who volunteered interviewed by the researcher. Individual interviews lasted on average 30minutes, with the shortest interview 10 minutes and the longest 84

minutes. Demographic data was collected from interview participants only, encompassing a broad range of ages and backgrounds, however the representation of gender and ethnicity reflected the predominantly white female membership of the library groups. Interviews were conducted in locations selected by participants including libraries (during group sessions, immediately after sessions and outwith group sessions), coffee shops and two participants own homes.

Prior to conducting the first interview, the researcher created an interview schedule consisting of 10 questions clustered together into set areas of interest identified during the literature review (Q1-5 group focus, Q6-10 public library focus)<sup>2</sup>. The researcher decided against amending the interview schedule following the first block of observation, determining that the questions were appropriate to the objectives of this study. The schedule began with open questions, applicable to all group activities, to enable participants to assign their own meanings as opposed to respond to pre-existing categories of meaning identified by the researcher. During each interview questions were predominantly delivered in the same order, with some variation directly in response to participant answers. During the natural narrative flow of interviews some observation interpretations were provided by the researcher to participants to enable further clarification or discussion of responses provided to interview questions.

The researcher had initially intended to conduct individual interviews only, however when requested conducted a joint interview of a married couple who both attended the same group. Further for both adult literacy and numeracy groups after discussion with group session leaders, the researcher decided to conduct whole group interviews. The researcher determined that this would be the best approach as participants were deemed too vulnerable to meet independently outwith the group setting and the researcher believed participants would feel more comfortable answering questions as a group. To aid comprehension written copies of questions were circulated to participants with words explained where requested. This approach whilst most appropriate to the needs of participants, proved practically difficult for the researcher to administer and transcribe. Further it meant that participants did not have the time to go into as much detail as they

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<sup>2</sup> Interview Schedule included in Appendix 1

may have independently and in one group not all participants answered every question as some left at various points for comfort breaks (e.g., toilet, smoking). All interviews were audio-recorded with the exception of participants from one group, with predominantly mental and physical health concerns, who did not feel comfortable being recorded. For those participants the researcher interviewed each willing participant individually in the library, taking written notes only. Further to aid trust for this group, the researcher circulated written copies of questions in advance of the interview.

### 3.3.4 Completed Fieldwork

Over the course of 3 consecutive blocks of fieldwork, the researcher conducted participant observation and semi-structured interviews at 9 library branches located in deprived areas of the city, with a focus on branches in the most deprived areas as per the SIMD<sup>3</sup>. An even distribution of participation by area (North-East, North-West and South) and category (Social, Developmental and Cultural) was achieved.

Libraries visited	<b>9</b>
Observed Groups	<b>12</b>
Observed Sessions	<b>48</b>
Observed Hours	<b>114</b>
Participants Interviewed	<b>42</b>

Figure 6: Completed Fieldwork Overview

	<b>Fieldwork Block 1</b>	<b>Fieldwork Block 2</b>	<b>Fieldwork Block 3</b>
Library Area	<i>Social Groups</i> (12 weeks) <b>Observed Sessions:</b> 17 <b>Interviews:</b> 14	<i>Developmental Groups</i> (12 weeks) <b>Observed Sessions:</b> 18 <b>Interviews:</b> 15	<i>Cultural Groups</i> (12 weeks) <b>Observed Sessions:</b> 13 <b>Interviews:</b> 13
North-East (E)	Walking Group (E1) Knitting (E2)	Bounce & Rhyme (E3)	Creative Writing (E2)
North-West (W)		Literacy & Numeracy (W1) Bounce & Rhyme (W2)	Book Group (W3) Creative Writing (W3)
South (S)	Knitting (S1) Walking Group (S1)	Literacy & Numeracy (S2)	Book Group (S3)

Figure 7: Completed Fieldwork per Activity & Area

<sup>3</sup> Each library included was located within the 25% most deprived data zones, with a focus where possible on libraries located within the 5% most deprived data zones in Scotland.



## 3.4 Ethics

### 3.4.1 Ethical Research Considerations

Kumar (2014, P286) distinguishes between ethical considerations relating to the treatment of participants and ethical issues relating to the researcher. This section will detail the ethical considerations the researcher believed to be pertinent to this study and their planned approach to address these throughout the research process.

#### 3.4.1.1 *Ethical Treatment of Participants*

There are four key ethical concerns in social research: harm, privacy, consent, and deception (Diener and Crandall, 1978, as cited in Bryman, 2012 p.135). Hammersley & Traianou (2012, p.63) argue that when considering the potential risk of harm to research participants that, researchers should make judgements 'in the context being investigated'. Given that this study explored the personal experiences of, and meanings associated with public library use in Glasgow, a potential risk of harm would have been failing to sufficiently preserve the privacy of participants. Whilst an objective of this research was to evidence the role of public libraries in encouraging and enabling cultural engagement within areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow, the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, library groups and venues were preserved within this study. This was achieved by allocating pseudonyms to participants and library branches, which were used in both the researcher's published (thesis, articles, reports, presentations) and unpublished data (full transcripts, notes, drafts). There remained a potential risk of participants being identified via the discussion of specific group sub types in instances where only a small number of such groups operated in Glasgow. To minimize this risk, the researcher altered any specific details in this context which could lead to a participant being identified, whilst preserving and respecting the meaning of participants' words (Bryman, 2012, p.142).

Feinberg (1984) argues that harm can also include 'value weighting of a variety of kinds' (Feinberg, 1984, as cited in Hammersley & Traianou 2012, p.61). An ethical concern when researching the concept of cultural capital, centres on the extent to which the concept when operationalised as a familiarity with 'legitimate culture' perpetuates class distinctions by a reliance on elitist and hierarchical judgements of cultural value. Arguably when researchers adopt this position, they are engaged in a covert representation of their research to those

participants with low levels of cultural capital, who may not have agreed to participate had they been made fully aware of the true nature of the study. For example, Holt (1997) found that a research participant with low levels of cultural capital became uncomfortable when they perceived that they were failing to do something which the researcher was trying to elicit. Deception in the conduct of research can leave research 'subjects' feeling deceived, angry, humiliated and upset. Deception can include when a researcher fails to disclose their status as a researcher within the workplace such as in Holdaway's (1983) research on the police (Holdaway, 1983 as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.131) or assumes a new identity to gain access to an area of interest such as Humphrey's (1970) research on homosexual encounters in public places (Humphrey, 1970, as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.131). Given the researcher's rejection of hierarchical notions of cultural value and focus on exploring the meanings associated with cultural engagement in areas of multiple deprivations from the perspective of library users themselves, there was no deception in the representation of the nature of this study to participants.

Obtaining the informed consent of those involved, underpins a commitment to the ethical practice of research which respects and values the contributions of research participants over the data acquired from unsuspecting research subjects. The researcher sought and obtained consent at all stages of the research process. First, the researcher obtained consent from the Glasgow Life principal librarians responsible for the three public library service areas where they planned to conduct research. Next the researcher approached each library group to request consent from group members to join the group in the role of participant observer with members provided with project documentation and an observation consent form<sup>4</sup>. The consent form outlined participants right to opt in or out of the research study, to withdraw their consent within an agreed period and the researcher's commitment to preserving confidentiality and securely storing data. Finally following observation and prior to conducting semi-structured interviews, the research provided a second interview consent form which related to the use of audio recording equipment and the participants option to refuse. An important ethical consideration in providing consent is that participants take part in research voluntarily and do not feel coerced to participate

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<sup>4</sup> Consent forms and additional project documentation included in Appendix 1

(Seale, 2012, p.218). The researcher believed that the voluntary nature of library use, in addition to the autonomy of library group members to opt in or out of the research process would protect against this.

#### *3.4.1.2 Researcher Bias*

A further ethical consideration in the conduct of research is the issue of bias. Bias reflects what a researcher either consciously or subconsciously brings to their research which can influence or distort the validity of the study. Bias can present an issue at each stage of the research process, beginning with the selection of a research topic. Seidman (1998, p.26 as cited in Lapan et al, 2012, p.254) highlights that a researcher's interest in a research topic is often informed by prior involvement constituting an 'inherent paradox' for ensuring objectivity. Therefore, transparency is an important consideration where a researcher has a previous involvement with or connection to the case being studied. As a librarian conducting research in the public library context for a former employer and as part of commissioned research, the researcher recognised from the outset that both acknowledging and avoiding bias would be important in ensuring the validity of this study.

This study was commissioned to understand the contemporary role of Glasgow's public libraries in generating cultural capital, however no stipulation was provided as to how the concept should be sensitised or where the research would be conducted. The researcher's decision to focus on library group activities operating in libraries in areas of multiple deprivation was informed by the findings of the literature review. The researcher selected groups and locations based on relevance, variety, and opportunity however, to avoid bias the researcher purposefully chose to not select any libraries as a research site where they had previously worked on a regular basis. Further, with the exception of a short period delivering bounce and rhyme sessions as a volunteer in Glasgow libraries, the researcher did not select any group activities which they had any prior knowledge of or involvement in. The researcher was open with study participants during initial recruitment and subsequent interactions regarding both their prior professional experience as a librarian in Glasgow and positive childhood experiences of public library use. The researcher's decision to share personal information with participants when requested or relevant was done so in the spirit

of transparency and to aid the research process by facilitating acceptance, building trust, and stimulating connection with no intent to create bias.

Researcher reflexivity is an important consideration within this study, given the potentially positive and negative impacts of the researcher's personal experiences as both a librarian and library user. Prior knowledge and experience can enable the researcher to 'respond' to data, providing the 'capacity' to discover the links, hidden meanings and insights contained (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.33), however can also generate bias whilst conducting field work and influence data analysis. In addition, bias can also prove a problem in qualitative studies where a strong rapport has been developed between researcher and participant (Gray, 2014, p.461). As recommended by Finlay (2002, p.532), to avoid bias by aiding transparency and providing regular opportunities for reflexivity the researcher had intended to complete a 'methodological log of research decisions' during data collection and analysis, but this was not completed at either point as the researcher perceived these processes as natural and standard at the time. For example, as a control for researcher bias a standardised approach to data collection across all groups was adopted throughout which involved conducting semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. The researcher devised open questions which could be used across all group activities and discussed the integrity of questions with their supervisor prior to administration. Further the researcher's decision to observe and interview participants from two groups of the same type (e.g., two walking groups) and two different types within a category (e.g. social- walking and knitting groups) was perceived as constituting rigor by providing a sufficient data sample for verification of findings.

### 3.4.2 Ethical Approval

After identifying key ethical research considerations associated with working with human research participants and how these would be addressed in the methodology of this study, the researcher sought ethical approval from the Computer and Information Science (CIS) Ethics Committee at Strathclyde University. The departmental ethics process aims to ensure that researchers adhere to professional standards of conduct which safeguard the rights and wellbeing of research participants. Obtaining ethical approval from the CIS Ethics Committee is compulsory before fieldwork can begin, with researchers required to detail how they will maintain ethical conduct both during interactions with research participants and the management of their data.

The researcher successfully obtained ethical approval by providing a summary of the research project and outlining how participants would be voluntarily recruited from public library groups operating in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow<sup>5</sup>. Further the researcher detailed what information would be provided about the research to participants, how consent would be demonstrated and the types of data which would be collected. In addition, the researcher detailed how project data would be ethically managed in accordance with guidance set out by the research projects funders the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) utilising Strathclyde University data repository PURE. To support the application, the researcher included project documentation<sup>6</sup> which would be given to participants during the research (e.g., information sheet, consent form, interview schedule)

### 3.4.3 Ethical Conduct in the Field

Developing an enhanced awareness of ethical research principles, considering potential ethical issues in relation to this study and completing the departmental ethics review process provided a framework for the researcher's approach to conducting ethical research in the field. During completion of fieldwork some ethical issues arose in relation to obtaining consent and avoiding harm.

#### 3.4.3.1 *Obtaining Consent*

Prior to the first visit with each group the researcher made themselves known to library staff and where appropriate was either introduced by a member of staff or approached groups independently. The researcher immediately made group participants aware of their role as a researcher, research focus and proposed duration of observation, following which initial verbal consent was requested. Project documentation (information sheet and observation consent form) was then distributed as soon as possible after the initial approach, with the researcher purposively limiting intrusion upon the standard flow of each group meeting. However, given the large scope of the research project which included 12 different library groups engaging in 6 different activities across 9 branches, the researcher faced unanticipated challenges in obtaining signed consent forms from all participants:

- **Practical:** Whilst most groups had less than 15 participants with the activity taking place in the library, one library group had over 70 participants attending each week with the

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<sup>5</sup> Ethical Approval Documentation included in Appendix 4

<sup>6</sup> Project Documentation included in Appendix 1

library providing only an initial meeting place for the group which presented practical challenges in distributing and returning consent forms. The researcher liaised with the group leader to address the issue of consent, agreeing that during a briefing led by the group leader at the start of every group session, consent forms would be distributed, and the researcher would verbally address the whole group reiterating their request to observe the session and ensure that all participants were aware of their role as a researcher and the focus of the project.

- **Literacy:** For some participants literacy presented a barrier to obtaining written consent as they were unable to read either the project information form or the consent forms provided. For these participants the researcher read both forms aloud then checked with the participants that they understood the language used and answered any queries.
- **Trust:** A further challenge experienced by the researcher to obtaining signed consent forms in one group, which consisted predominantly of participants with physical and mental health conditions, was trust. The researcher had not been advised by Glasgow Life, despite notifying senior staff of proposed groups and locations they wished to include, of any health considerations within the group. On initial approach group participants were apprehensive about taking part in the study, fearful of being identified in published research and worried about a specific research interest in their health. In response the researcher provided reassurances both of the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of the research, detailed the aims of their study and the inclusion of multiple library groups across the city (including a different group at the same branch), discussed the groups concerns and provided project documentation (information sheet and consent forms). By developing a rapport, addressing specific concerns and building trust with the group, the researcher obtained verbal consent from all members of the group to observation. Some participants however did not feel comfortable physically signing a consent form and the researcher felt it appropriate to respect their decision and accept verbal as opposed to written consent.

#### *3.4.3.2 Avoiding Harm*

Gray (2014, P74) argues that harm in research is a broad term which can encompass situations which cause 'anxiety or stress to participants or produces negative emotional reactions'. The researcher experienced two situations which encompassed the issue of

harm- one in which they had to weigh up which action would cause the least harm to participants and another in which they unintentionally caused distress.

- **Bereavement**- During observation of one group a participant passed away suddenly, with the researcher present when some group members were notified. The researcher felt that exiting the group immediately as scheduled could have caused more harm to participants than remaining during a difficult and private period, particularly as the deceased participant had been a passionate advocate for libraries throughout their life and had been interested in the research topic. Having formed a bond with group members including the deceased during observation, the researcher determined it was appropriate to attend the funeral and remain with the group for a longer period than withdraw when originally stated, confirming with the group that they were comfortable with this course of action.
- **Distress**- Given the subject of this research and the specific focus of interview questions, the researcher did not sufficiently anticipate that some participants could feel distress in sharing personal information relating to the research topic. Following one interview, the researcher received a withdrawal request via email from a participant. During the interview there had been no indication that the process was unintentionally and unexpectedly causing the participant distress. Their decision to share certain personal information came voluntarily in response to the standard interview question schedule, which had been administered to all other research participants with no previous issue, as opposed to additional prompts by the researcher. The participants right to withdraw from the research at any time was specified in the project documentation provided and upon receiving the request the researcher immediately notified their supervisor and followed department protocol, contacting the participant to notify them that the interview recording, and all paperwork would be destroyed.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

### 3.5.1 Approach

The researcher's decision to adopt a grounded theory approach, as previously discussed in relation to research design and data collection, also incorporated the analysis of data. Data analysis constitutes a 'logical process through which data are given meaning' which involves going 'beyond description' to 'interpret', 'understand', 'explain' and 'gain new insights into'

research data (Gray, 2014, p.602-607). The researcher believed that an iterative relationship between data collection and analysis would aid the development of theory (Bryman, 2012, p.570). To facilitate this the project research design encompassed the 'core' components of grounded theory analysis: contribution to theory development, generalisation and validity via theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation and the continuous collection and comparison of data (Seale, 2012). In the first phase of the study the researcher planned to collect and analyse data during a 4week period of participant observation, which would then be used to inform the design of semi structured interview questions. Beginning with social groups, the researcher planned to repeat and refine this process in subsequent applications with developmental groups before concluding with cultural groups. The researcher planned to transcribe all observation and interview data from each 12-week research block: social, developmental, and cultural during that period. The researcher believed this would ensure familiarisation with the data which would facilitate the generation of codes and identification of themes during each stage of the research, which would then be used to inform the next stage where required.

Central to a grounded theory analysis of data is the 'fluid' process of coding (Bryman, 2012, p.568). Coding in grounded theory represents 'a movement from generating codes that stay close to the data to more selective and abstract ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon of interest' (Bryman, 2012, p.570). Coding is a three-stage process which begins with the researcher grouping data together into categories (open coding), identifying the links between categories (axial coding) and developing theory following the synthesis of categories (selective coding) (Gray, 2014, p.611). To move from open to selective coding the researcher planned to use a process of thematic analysis similar to the six-step approach of Braun & Clarke (2006): data transcription and familiarisation; initial code generation; collating codes into themes; reviewing themes; refining themes; and producing themes. Goulding (2009) found this approach successful in a study of the meanings individuals associate with living museums (Goulding, 2009 as cited in Bryman, 2012, p.572). The researcher planned to compile a code book which would include: all codes generated including the tracking of initial codes, reasons for refining codes and a thematic map as an illustrative aid. The researcher planned to disaggregate data into meaningful categories via identification of patterns and regularities through a process of iterative pattern coding



(Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given the exploratory nature of this study and the absence of applicable cultural capital categories within existing literature, a content analysis approach was deemed unsuitable for this study as 'categories are brought to' as opposed to 'derived from' the data. (Gray, 2014, p.608)

### 3.5.2 Completed Thematic Analysis

#### 3.5.2.1 *Data Transcription and Familiarisation*

The researcher collected and compared data over three consecutive 12-week blocks of fieldwork (Social, Developmental, Cultural). During each fieldwork block all observation notes were recorded and interviews transcribed, with project data read regularly and repeatedly to facilitate familiarisation and generate insight. The researcher decided against using either automated transcription or data analysis software such as Nvivo, determining that personally transcribing interviews would enable them to stay close to collected data which would best support understanding and analysis of data from the outset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.87-88). Beginning with Social Groups (2 x Walking and 2 x Knitting), interviews were transcribed by the researcher predominantly immediately following the interview or within days depending on other scheduled interview commitments. All interview participants were allocated a unique anonymised alphanumeric identifier which was used when storing audio files of recorded interviews and on typed transcriptions completed in Microsoft word. Following completed transcription, interview responses were added to Microsoft excel into two spreadsheets. The first consisted of individual tabs for each participant containing their response to all questions, whilst the second contained participant responses grouped together in individual tabs by each interview question.

The researcher began preliminary data analysis of the first dataset (social groups) by comparing individual transcriptions and searching for patterns within (e.g knitting groups) and across (e.g knitting and walking groups) full interview responses in the first excel spreadsheet. The researcher highlighted phrases and words reflecting shared meanings and motivations associated with participation in a library group, jotting down emerging broad themes (e.g., wellbeing). Next the researcher repeated this process using the second excel spreadsheet, reviewing collective participant responses to each interview question, generating initial simple codes from similar responses provided by multiple participants to

the same question. Analysis of data at two levels, full interview and individual question, was undertaken by the researcher to facilitate 'depth and breadth' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87) in understanding of their first dataset and inform further data collection. Having identified preliminary patterns amongst participant responses from both group activities (knitting and walking) during initial analysis, the researcher believed that the data gathered from the existing interview schedule had sufficiently addressed the project research questions. To build on the data gathered and generate further insight, the researcher determined that the interview schedule did not require refinement prior to subsequent fieldwork with developmental groups. The researcher replicated the transcription and familiarisation steps outlined with the second dataset (developmental groups), again generating broad themes and initial simple codes from analysing data at both a whole interview and an individual question level. Confident in their approach to data collection and analysis, the process was repeated for a third time with cultural groups.

#### *3.5.2.2 Coding data and Identifying themes*

Having completed preliminary analysis of three individual datasets and allocated initial codes during each consecutive block of fieldwork, the researcher determined an important next step in analysing project data would be to create a combined dataset and actively re-read data from social, developmental, and cultural groups collectively. The researcher believed this would support thematic analysis 'across' project data facilitating identification of 'repeated patterns of meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86). Existing spreadsheets for each dataset (social, cultural, and developmental) were combined into two new spreadsheets, the first containing all participant full interview responses and the second containing grouped together participant responses to individual questions. The researcher 'systematically' read through the first spreadsheet, 'giving full and equal attention to each data item' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86) jotting down broad themes. Next the researcher read through collective responses to each interview question in the second spreadsheet, noting initial codes on a question-by-question basis. To guide further analysis the researcher created a preliminary thematic map, grouping together themes and codes.

The researcher's decision to adopt a grounded approach, combining induction and deduction, shaped the coding of project data at each level (open, axial, selective). The

project research questions and the literature review were utilised to identify preliminary areas of interest to explore in the data, as opposed to create a 'pre-existing coding frame' to devise themes 'driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area or topic' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p83). Predetermined codes brought to data can 'bias the research' (Gray, 2014, p.614), therefore as the researcher was committed to 'remaining open to new ideas and concepts' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.40) throughout coding and analysis, codes were driven by the data. The literature review provided a point of reference during initial 'open' 'brainstorming' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.52), informing but not determining how codes were assigned and grouped together into themes. When reviewing and refining themes, the researcher applied the 'capacity' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.33) provided by knowledge of the literature to identify links and interpret 'their broader meanings and implications' to produce themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84).

Coding data and identifying themes across the combined dataset was a 'recursive' as opposed to 'linear' process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86). Codes, understood as a symbolic word or phrase allocated to capture the essence of the data (Saldana, 2009, p.3), varied from assigned descriptive words to phrases specifically used by participants. The researcher began open coding by focusing on grouped participant responses to semi structured interview on a question-by-question basis. Due to the broad focus and large volume of data collected, the researcher determined that this approach would best aid their understanding of the entire dataset and support connection of the 'threads that tie together' data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.69), whilst providing a foundational overview for further analysis across question responses. Beginning with question one<sup>7</sup>: can you tell me what motivated you to join the group? the researcher printed hard copies of individual participants response to this question, and via 'close examination' (Strauss & Corbin, 1988, p.62 as cited by Gray, 2014, p.612) of responses manually coded each line by line before moving on to the next. Participant responses were coded on an activity-by-activity basis (e.g., walking groups, then knitting groups etc) to aid identification and comparison of 'similarities and differences' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.96) amongst responses and through that contrast 'maximize the potential for variety in concepts' (Bazeley, 2007, p.61 as cited in Saldana, 2009, p.18). This

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<sup>7</sup> Question one coding & analysis example included in Appendix 3

process was completed for each interview question, with codes and emerging themes noted in a journal before moving on to axial coding of data.

To review and refine codes, the researcher created a coding sheet<sup>8</sup> for each question as a tool to reduce and display data and facilitate conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp.10-11). The coding sheet supported these processes by aiding focused grouping of, identifying patterns, and tracking the prevalence of provisionally assigned codes. On a question-by-question basis the researcher re-read coded data, re-examining assigned codes prior to addition to the coding sheet, all completed coding sheets were then compared with codes revisited in the context of emerging themes. The layout of the coding sheet helped to 'focus' and 'sharpen' displayed data as 'an organized, compressed assembly of information' which supported 'conclusion drawing' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11) by enhancing understanding of the prevalence of codes 'within' and 'across' individual participants, activities, and questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). This was an important consideration in this study as the researcher sought to generate empirically informed insight in 'an under-researched area' via the provision of both 'a rich overall description' of the data and 'a more detailed and nuanced account' of main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.83). Prevalence was a consideration in identifying themes, however the researcher additionally used their 'judgement' to establish whether a theme had 'captured an important element' more broadly 'in relation to the overall research question' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Further, post-it notes were used as 'visual representations' of codes, which were manually grouped together to refocus 'analysis at the broader level of themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89).

To 'define and refine' themes, the researcher created a short paragraph outlining the 'scope and content' of each identified theme (social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing), before weaving these together to create a summary of the overall picture of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). Following this the researcher determined that each of the four themes provided both distinctive and collective insight into the central research focus on the library role in communities and what group activities contributed to this. To best convey 'the story of the data within and across themes' the researcher then created a detailed

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<sup>8</sup> Coding Sheet example in Appendix 2

three-part written analysis focussing on the four themes: in combination within each group activity, individually in depth, and collective implications for theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). To support interpretation and explanation of the themes, the researcher included illustrative participant quotes throughout the written analysis which best conveyed 'the essence of the point' being made (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93).

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the researcher's planned and undertaken approach to collecting and analysing data, and the methodological and ethical considerations underpinning this process. The researcher began by detailing their ontological and epistemological positions, and how these shaped an inclusive qualitative approach to investigating the library role in stimulating cultural engagement and supporting the development of cultural capital. A strategy was outlined for exploring the cultural and social aspects of participation via an instrumental comparative case study design, encompassing six library group activities as cases, focused on participant perspectives and experiences obtained via observation and interview. Participant observation and face to face semi-structured interviews were selected as research methods for this study, to enable the researcher to understand groups from an insider perspective and facilitate a meaningful exploration of the motivations, barriers and drivers to, benefits of, and meaning derived from participation as understood by library users. To safeguard the rights and wellbeing of participants during application of both qualitative methods the researcher identified key ethical research considerations in relation to harm, privacy, consent, deception, and bias and obtained ethical approval before entering the field to collect data.

To collect empirical data the researcher designed and completed a comprehensive programme of fieldwork, comprising 12 library groups (2 of each activity) across 9 libraries located in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow (SIMD<25%). To aid data collection and analysis group activities were arranged into categories (social, developmental, cultural) with consecutive 12-week blocks of fieldwork conducted for each category. Semi-Structured interviews were utilised as the primary method of data collection, with 42 library group members interviewed with an even representation of participants achieved across both category (social, developmental, cultural) and service area (North-West, North-East, South).

Participant observation was used as a mechanism of gaining an understanding of the research environment, obtaining contextual research data, and building trust and acceptance with participants prior to interview. All observation and interview data from each fieldwork block: social, developmental, and cultural was transcribed and read regularly during that period to aid familiarisation. Preliminary analysis of data at two levels, participants full interview responses and grouped together responses to individual questions, was undertaken for each category before the datasets were combined and actively re-read collectively to support thematic analysis 'across' project data facilitating the identification of 'repeated patterns of meaning' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86).

Due to the broad scope in focus of this study and the large amount of data collected, the research determined that coding grouped participant responses to semi structured interview on a question-by-question basis would best aid their understanding of the entire dataset and provide a foundational overview for further analysis across question responses. Participant responses to each interview question were coded on an activity-by-activity basis (e.g., walking groups, then knitting groups etc) to aid the researcher in identifying and comparing 'similarities and differences' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.96) across each case and amongst responses, then compared to generate a more abstracted collective understanding of the story of the data across all questions with codes revisited in the context of emerging themes. Four themes (social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing) were identified by the researcher evidencing both distinctive and collective shared aspects of participation within and across the six cases activities, to generate empirically informed insight of the library role in disadvantaged communities and the important contribution of group activities. To best convey 'the story of the data within and across themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93) research findings are presented on a question-by-question basis in the next chapter, followed by a discussion of the four themes in combination within each group activity, individually in depth, and collective implications for theory in the following chapter.

# Chapter 4

# Findings

- 4.1 [Introduction](#)
- 4.2 [Participant Observation](#)
- 4.3 [Interview Responses](#)
- 4.4 [Cultural Participation Survey](#)
- 4.5 [Conclusion](#)

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents empirical data gathered from observation of 12 library groups and interview of 42 participants, findings are arranged by data collection method starting with observation (4.2), then semi-structured interview (4.3) and accompanying survey responses (4.4). Throughout this findings chapter ***anonymised participant quotes are presented in bold italic for emphasis***. To provide context to subsequent discussion of the reality of group participation, this chapter begins with an illustrative snapshot of each group activity utilising data gathered during participant observation. Next semi-structured interview responses from participants from all library groups are presented collectively on a question-by-question basis, with themes listed in order of prevalence within coded responses provided for each of the 10 questions. Next quantitative and qualitative data is presented concerning the frequency of and reasons for wider cultural participation beyond public library use obtained during interview via an accompanying survey component. Finally, a summary is provided of the findings from each research method and how the key overarching themes identified will be explored in the subsequent discussion chapter.

### 4.2 Participant Observation

To enable a richer understanding of the meanings and motivations associated with participation in a public library group six activities were included (knitting, walking, adult literacy and numeracy, bounce and rhyme, creative writing, and book groups). For each activity two groups were attended in different locations in the city. This approach enabled the inclusion of 12 groups and 9 libraries aiding both the quality and quantity of data gathered, by enhancing the researcher's understanding of group participation through comparison between two groups engaged in the same activity and subsequently across groups engaged in varied activities. The researcher's primary intention with undertaking a short period of participant observation was to gain understanding of the research environment and build trust and acceptance with participants prior to interview. However, as participant observation provided additional valuable insight, the data presented below is intended to provide context to subsequent interview data rather than a comprehensive ethnographic account which is outwith the scope of this study. To ensure privacy and



confidentiality individual participants or specific group locations will not be identifiable from observation data presented.

#### 4.2.1      Knitting Groups

In observing two knitting groups, one only recently established by library staff, the researcher found a friendly atmosphere evident in both groups aided by the combination of knitting and conversation. In one group, which had been operating for many years, a strong camaraderie was obvious amongst participants who brought in knitting projects from home to show each other in addition to weekly home baking. Whilst in the newly established group, sociability was aided by the pre-existing relationship between many participants attending who were either known to each via attending another group in the library or related to each other (sisters, mother and daughter). Conversations in both groups encompassed many topics such as health, families, holidays, hobbies, work etc and varied from everyday friendly conversation, to supportive when participants were upset, in addition to more lively chat with participants joking together. For example, in one group the depth of friendship amongst participants was evident as they laughingly shared old stories of nights out together and a group effort to have their knitting featured on a favourite tv show. Further, in one group a visibly upset participant who was anxious about making a long-distance journey abroad to see relatives was consoled both by existing friends in the group and new members. Additionally, in both groups knitting projects were found to stimulate conversation as participants chatted about what they were working on, who they were making it for and any problems they were having.

Within both groups providing help was commonplace amongst participants, who were observed showing each other techniques, providing advice, and sharing resources. For example, in one group one participant brought along their sister to help someone with a problem they were having crocheting a blanket, afterwards another member of the group asked if they could switch seats to sit next to her to also receive help with a crochet problem. Further, in one group a participant routinely brought in old copies of knitting magazines for everyone to use. Additionally, providing help beyond the group for charities was found to be important to many of the participants, with participants in both groups observed knitting for various charities. For example, in one group some participants were

knitting clothing for Oxfam for new-borns in Africa, the small jumpers made in dark coloured wool were known locally in Glasgow as a 'fish shop baby' earning their nickname as the jumpers were used to replace newspaper which many babies were wrapped in like a fish supper. Further another participant shared that they only ever knitted for charities, responding to specific appeals for items and knitting those things requested which were observed by the researcher as being diverse ranging from teddy bears to adult hats for a lifeboat charity.

#### 4.2.2      Walking Groups

The researcher observed two walking groups in different parts of the city, both of which were well attended by a broad range of people (ages, genders, mobility), with the library used as a central meeting place from which to walk to a nearby local beauty spot. In one group, the venue of the walk provided a draw with large numbers of participants attending from outwith the local community. The other group, attended predominantly by local people, offered walks at two local venues which alternated weekly. There was a difference between the venues in relation to length of the walk and the terrain, with some participants choosing to attend fortnightly at the venue that suited their childcare commitments or mobility level. For example, a participant who had recently had a hip replacement waited outside their home to join the group as they walked by on their way from the library to a park nearby where the walk took place. Both groups were tailored to suit different mobility levels and fitness objectives, offering fast and slow route options. In both walking groups, the researcher observed participants keen to participate as much as personal factors would allow. For example, a participant currently unable to take part in the walk due to ill health was keen for her husband who had dementia to still participate so brought him along, spending time in the library on the pcs whilst the walk took place before joining the group socially afterwards.

Both groups were found to be sociable in nature, with most participants chatting with others during walks and then additionally afterwards in a local café or in the library. The researcher observed a familiarity between walking group participants and staff at these venues which added to the sociable atmosphere, particularly in one café where the group organised a birthday gift and cake for the café owner who thanked everyone by saying how much she enjoyed the groups weekly visits. In both groups socialising after the group did

not have a set end time, rather participants left individually as and when suited them. Groups as highlighted by participants provided opportunities to socialise with friends (both brought to and made in the group), neighbours and family (e.g., couples, adults attending with elderly parents). For example, the researcher observed spouses arriving together, but then walking separately with their friends before reconvening after the walk to socialise together again as a couple with others. Participants in both groups shared that friendships originally developed in groups, had extended beyond the group to include additional socialisation. For example, one elderly participant who attended many other groups, made a point of stressing that it was in the walking group specifically that they felt they had made friends, making a distinction between friendship, and knowing someone for a long time, highlighting that they had been to each other's homes socially.

#### 4.2.3      Adult Literacy & Numeracy Groups

In observing two adult literacy and numeracy groups in different parts of the city, the researcher found that groups were attended by a broad range of people. For example, by people: of all ages (representation in each age bracket 16-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-65, 66-90), varying ability level, with disabilities, with English as their second language, employed and unemployed and by both men and women. Both groups had regular participants who had been attending for a long time who were committed to attending the group. For example, some employed participants could only attend on alternate weeks as their work schedule allowed but did so routinely. Another participant continued to attend the group whilst off sick from work, ducking down in their chair for fear of being seen by their employer who walked by the library window whilst the group was in session. Another participant who had been attending for years and had previously attended with his wife, continued to do so after she was no longer able to attend due to ill health. Another participant arrived each week sweaty and out of breath as despite the group being local, the poor transport routes in the area meant that to get to the group they had to walk for 40 minutes to get there.

A friendly, encouraging, and supportive atmosphere was evident in both groups. For example, during a reading aloud activity, some participants would say well done after someone had finished reading. In another group a participant who struggled reading aloud some of the words allocated, was helped by another member who read those words aloud despite initially not wanting to take a turn. The researcher found that giving and receiving

help both with the activities and day to day things was provided by both session leaders and group members. For example, participants worked on allocated activities together finding and sharing answers between themselves. Further, one participant keen to discuss the latest football news had a copy of a newspaper with him and suspected from a picture of a footballer on the back page that a transfer was likely but was unable to read the newspaper to find out whether this was the case. The session leader read the article to the participant, and they happily joked together about football. Additionally, the researcher observed that groups provided emotional support for some participants, for example one participant shared with the group the news that his brother had recently passed away with members responding with kindness and compassion. Another participant who seemed really shaken shared with the group that coming along to the session marked the first time they had managed to leave the house in days after witnessing a distressing incident.

#### 4.2.4 Bounce & Rhyme Groups

In bounce and rhyme groups despite sessions following a set structure (hello song, songs/rhymes/story, goodbye song) the researcher found there was no such thing as a typical session, with sessions influenced by the participants attending. For example, high or low turnout was found to be a factor with one group in one library well attended and the other in another library not. In the poorly attended group (<10 participants) during one session only one mother and child came along, despite this the session went ahead with the session leader making a point of reading the story directly to the child in attendance. In the well-attended group (>10 participants) one participant shared that her child was upset that they had not gotten a chance to push the button on a book which was shared around the room by the session leader. The researcher observed that the mix of ages of children attending influenced how a session leader delivered the session (more active songs for older toddlers, more calming songs for younger babies). The age mix of children also affected their behaviour as older children made friends and ran around, for example at one point two toddlers(>3yrs) were particularly interested in a toy house with bookshelves located in the junior area of the library preferring to play than participate. Groups were found to be ethnically diverse, in one session of a poorly attended group only two participants attended both of which were BAME but of different nationalities. One of the participants who had no

English at all was able to participate in the accompanying hand actions of songs, but unable to sing the words or converse with the session leader.

Group attendance was observed as being flexible with a mix of regular attendees and parents/relatives attending as and when convenient. Groups were sociable in nature with a mix of both friendly interaction and deep connections, some brought to the group through pre-existing relationships others formed during regular participation. The researcher felt there was a feeling of ease and trust amongst the participants, for example one grandmother bringing her grandchild along for the first time in place of her daughter in law handed the drooling child to another unknown mother next to her whilst she got a bib. The atmosphere of groups was found to be affected by the enthusiasm of both children and parents which manifested in relation to song performance. The songs selected varied from session to session with children found to become animated in anticipation of or during the singing of their favourite. For example, one child(<18mnths) upon arriving at the library rushed over to the area where the group is held saying “round round” in anticipation of the song wheels on the bus. Whilst another child(<18mnths) got particularly animated when wind the bobbin up was performed by the group, with his mother explaining that this was his favourite song and the only one she sang to him at home as she did not know the words to any others. Children were observed as looking more engaged in sessions when their parents also actively participated by singing along, performing the actions, and smiling.

#### 4.2.5 Creative Writing Groups

The researcher observed two writing groups, one well-established and one only recently established, finding both similarities and differences. Both groups featured writing exercises using library materials as inspiration, whilst both groups used book titles as topics for short stories in one group participants used the same title whilst in the other group participants individually chose their own book title. Following a set period of writing participants would read their work aloud, in the newly established group this functioned as an ice breaker with the group appearing more relaxed afterwards, whereas in the well-established group participants appeared to enjoy just sharing their work with each other. In both groups a passion for writing and a pride in the work created was evident amongst many participants. For example, during one session a participant mentioned to the group that they had recently entered a poem into a competition and were waiting to hear the outcome, going

on to recite the poem from memory following encouragement by the group. Additionally, some participants in both groups spoke about participating in other writing groups, performing their work live at events, having work published, winning prizes, and completing academic writing courses. For others writing was something more personal and private, which they were looking to develop as they had a specific story they wanted to tell, sharing work they had written with the group only when they felt comfortable.

In the well-established writing group, a strong bond was evident amongst participants with the supportive atmosphere including and extending beyond feedback of presented work, to include support in relation to personal issues with the sharing of private information observed as common place amongst participants. For example, one participant borrowed the glasses of another participant to read aloud sharing that they did not currently have their own as they were awaiting financial assistance to get a prescription pair. Further, one participant who had only received a diagnosis of dyslexia as an adult, shared with the group concerns that they may also have autism which was affecting their personal life but were unsure how to get tested. The group were very supportive, sharing their own related personal experiences and providing advice on how to get help. Additionally, the group were found to be protective of each other. For example, the group responded sensitively during and after an episode of physical ill health experience by a participant during a group session. The group stayed calm and carried on as normal during the incident, afterwards delicately alerting the participant who was unaware of what had happened to them.

#### 4.2.6      Book Groups

In both book groups observed by the researcher, book discussion was central to each group session but in different ways. One group meet monthly for two hours and read two books, with both books discussed in depth by the group with some members having researched additional information such as the authors nationality or period in which the book was set. The discussion of the allocated books was the primary focus of the group lasting for approximately 60-90mins, followed by socialisation over tea and biscuits. The other group met for one hour monthly and read one book, discussion of which whether liked or disliked lasted for the first 5-10mins of the group. The remainder of the session was predominantly social in nature, with discussion of favourite books forming a primary topic of conversation. For example, during one session participants were discussing adaptations of books currently

on television with one participant sharing how much they loved the Game of Thrones. This discussion led one participant to go to the library counter to see if there were any copies in stock and return with the first title in the series. Additionally, one participant revealed that they had come across a new prequel book in the series in a supermarket which they had bought, which others in the group were unaware of which led to participants searching for information on the newly published book on their smart phones.

Most participants attending both book groups were retired women (66-90) with each group additionally having a younger participant (35-49) and one man, which one group jokingly referred to as their token male. Both groups had been running for a long time, one group for over a decade, and were now self-led after having been previously led by a member of library staff. Participants selected their own books providing library staff with a list of books to be sourced, both groups complained that they often could not get enough copies of books they wanted to read. For example, during one session a participant mentioned that they had been unable to read one of the books allocated as there had not been enough copies. Additionally, in allocating books to members some elderly participants discussed having problems with heavy hardbacks and were observed choosing a paperback copy from those provided. Both groups appeared to be familiar with and comfortable in the library, with participants observed interacting with their surroundings before, during and after group sessions. For example, scanning the books for sale sections in each branch was popular with participants chatting about which were available leading one participant, alerted to the availability of a specific book, to rush over to retrieve it so they could buy it after the group had finished. Both groups were observed picking up leaflets and programmes for upcoming local events such as open doors day and discussing what they might attend/ had attended previously.

## 4.3 Interview

Following group observation semi-structured interviews were conducted with 42 participants from walking (WG), knitting (KG), bounce & rhyme (BR), adult literacy & numeracy (LN), creative writing (CW) and book groups (BG). Interviews lasted on average 30 mins and were conducted predominantly on an individual basis, with some joint and group interviews conducted where necessary. Findings have been presented by interview

question, with themes listed in order of prevalence in participant responses to each question. 3 participants were members of 2 groups and provided separate group specific answers for each question, resulting in a maximum number of responses received per question of 45. Not all participants asked a question provided an answer. The number of responses received per question does not correspond with the total number of responses received across codes, as many participants provided answers which included multiple codes (e.g., both social and developmental motivations). Throughout this chapter and subsequent chapters ***anonymised participant quotes are presented in bold italic for emphasis.*** Each participant was provided a unique identifier denoting group type and location these are included in this chapter after each illustrative quote to demonstrate the breadth of responses across groups within allocated codes and themes.

### 4.3.1 Interview Participant Demographics

#### 4.3.1.1 Gender

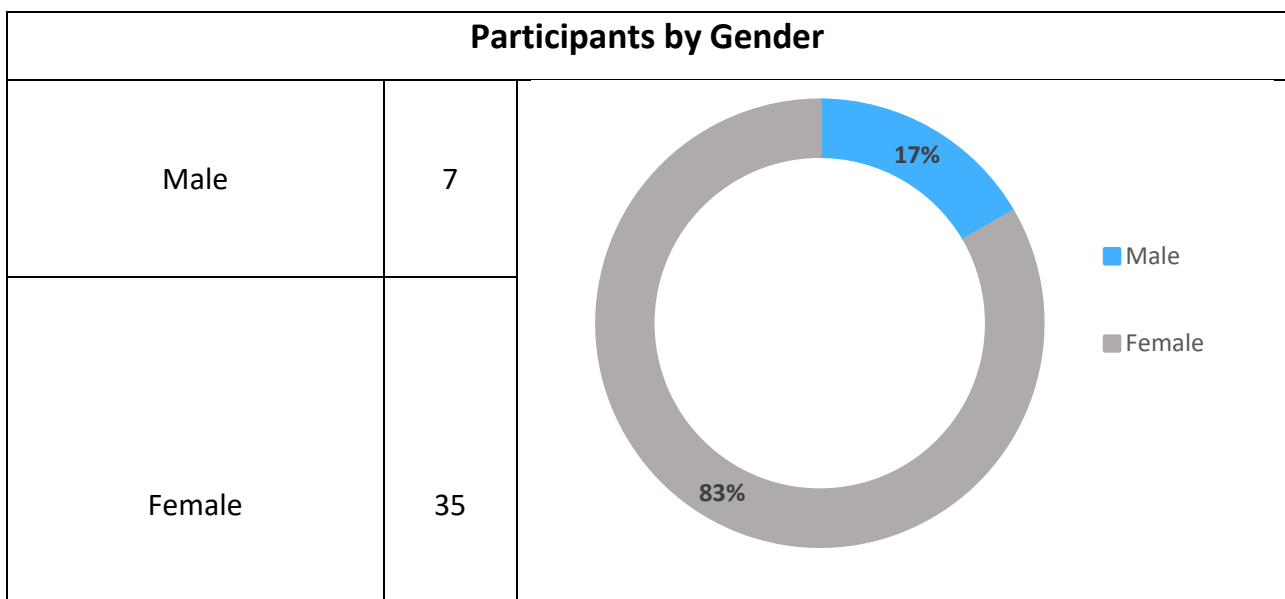


Figure 8: Interview Participant Demographics- Gender

#### 4.3.1.2 Age Range

Participants by Age	
16-24	1
25-34	6



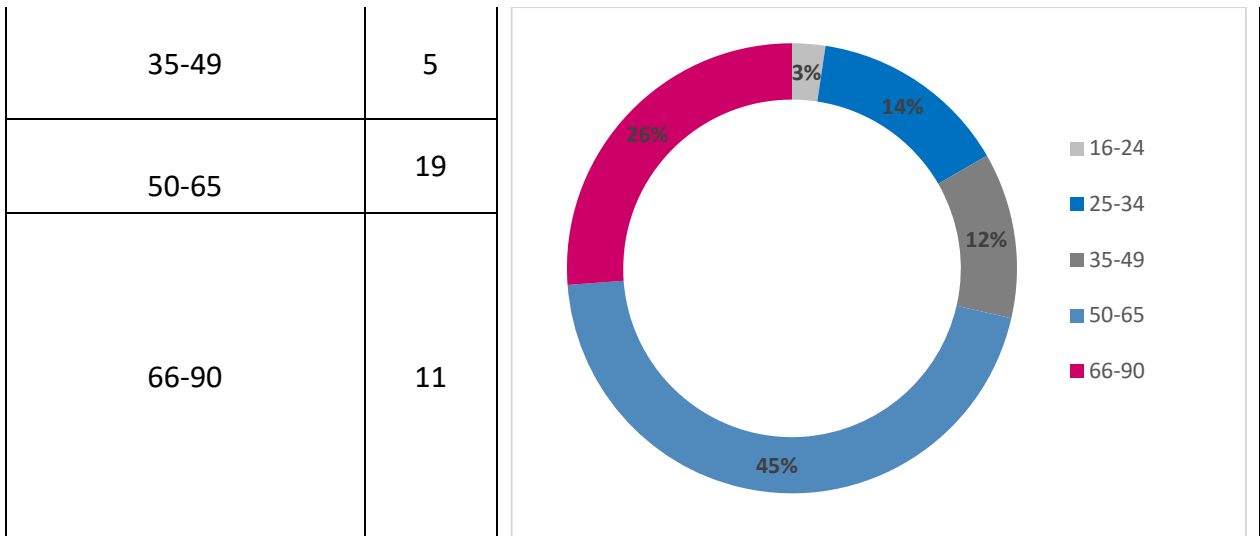


Figure 9: Interview Participant Demographics- Age

#### 4.3.1.3 SIMD

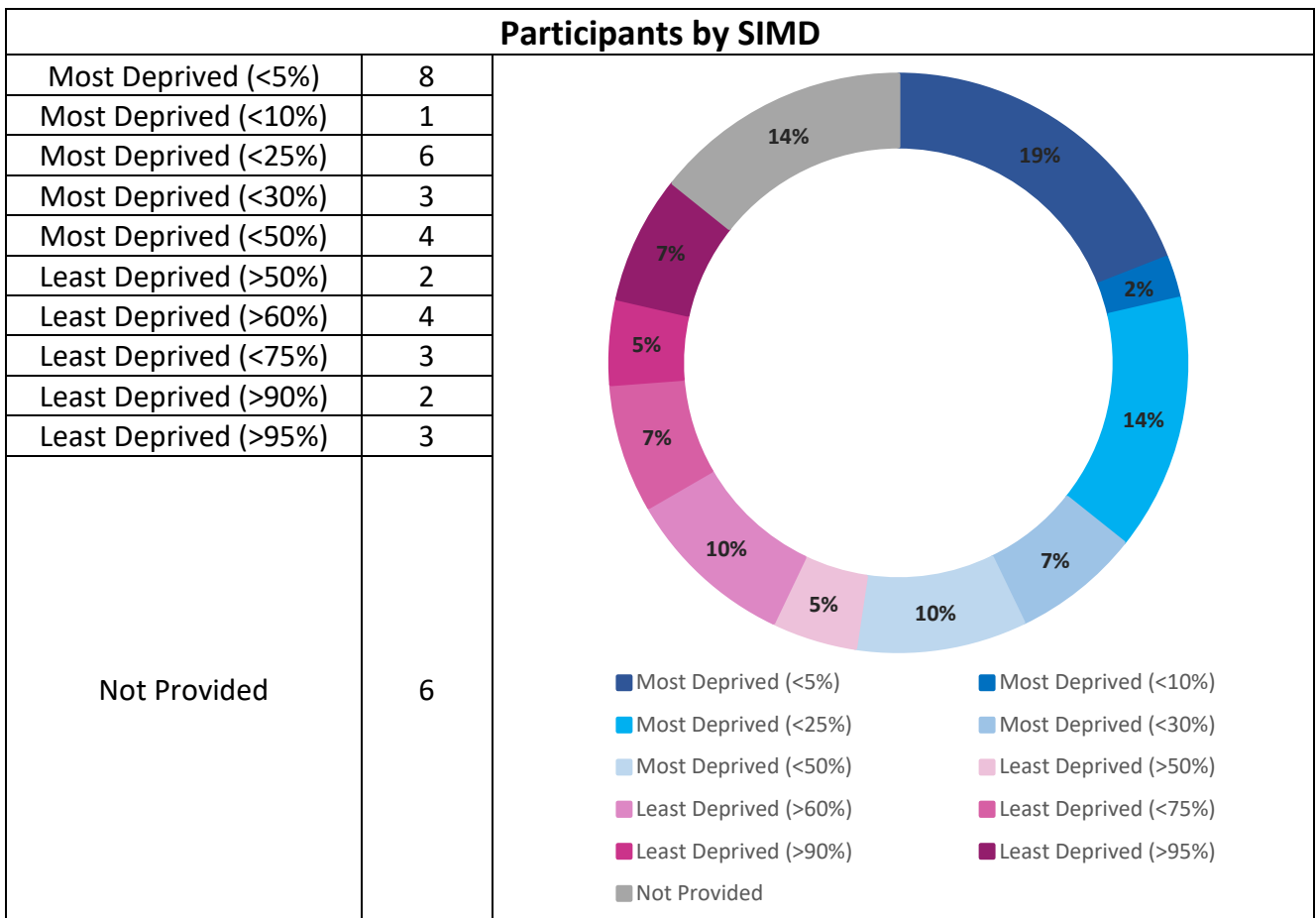


Figure 10: Interview Participant Demographics- SIMD

#### 4.3.1.4 Education

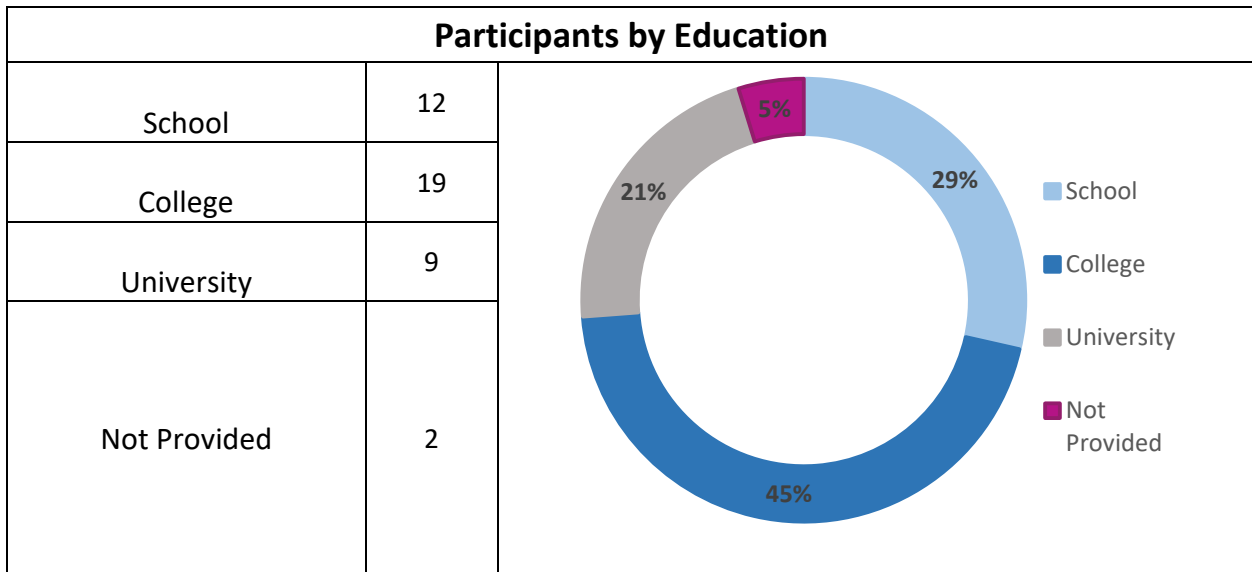


Figure 11: Interview Participant Demographics- Education

#### 4.2.1.5 Ethnicity

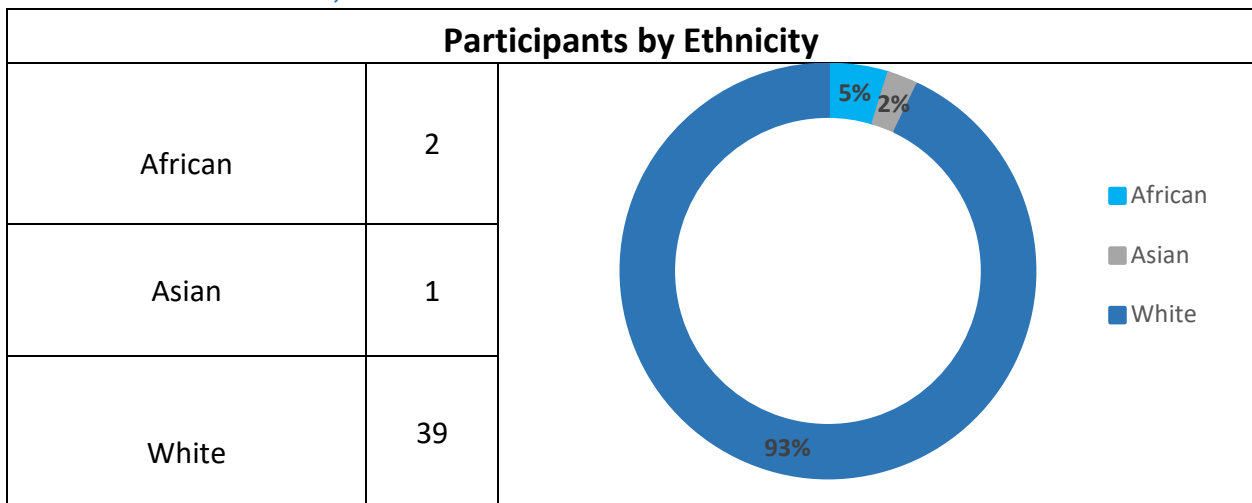


Figure 12: Interview Participant Demographics- Ethnicity

#### 4.3.2 Question 1, 1A and 1B Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked about their motivations for joining a library group (Q1), how they found out about it (Q1A) and duration/frequently of attendance(Q1B).

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
Q1	8	8	6	9	5	8	44
Q1A	8	7	4	5	3	7	34
Q1B (D) (F)	9	7	6	5	5	5	37
	6	6	4	1	4	2	23

Figure 13: Q1/1A/1B Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.2.1 Question 1- Can you tell me what motivated you to join the group?

Of the 44 responses provided by 41 participants, most provided multiple motivations for joining a library group resulting in 89 distinct motivations which have been grouped together into themes. The main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Development	0	3	5	8	3	4	23
Pre-existing Interest /Knowledge	2	3	2	4	3	5	19
Social	5	0	4	0	2	1	12
Request/Recommendation	4	2	0	3	1	1	11
Personal Circumstances	1	1	1	0	0	5	8
Practical Considerations	5	1	0	0	0	2	8
Health and Wellbeing	5	0	3	0	0	0	8

Figure 14: Q1 Coding Summary

- **DEVELOPMENT**

23 participants across 5 types of library groups, most members of developmental groups, stated that development either personally, professionally or for their child was a motivating factor in joining a library group. Many of those participants mentioned professional development either to help with employment or in finding employment as a reason they joined a library group with one participant commenting that:

***‘it was just to get my handwriting cause it’s part of my job... Just to get the spelling right, I just want to make sure I’ve got it right when I’m doing reception stuff so that’s what I’m doing it for’ (LN/S2/007)***

Whilst another participant commented:

***‘I joined it, so I can learn how to fill forms in so when I look for jobs I know how to fill forms in and spelling, reading’ (LN/W1/003)***

Many participants mentioned personal development in relation to the specific activity of the library group as a reason they joined a library group with one participant commenting that:

***‘To learn to crochet, which was obviously a talent or skill that I wanted to learn’ (KG/E2/007)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'I wasn't reading enough and I have a problem with fiction. I really don't enjoy fiction (laughs) no I don't so I thought discipline yourself, join the book group and read some fiction' (BG/W3/001)***

Most mothers mentioned their child's development as a reason they joined a library group. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I just wanted to try it for...her speech and just to help her along the way. Cause that's part of her journey and if you need a strong foundation from the beginning in how to teach your kid and if you do that by the time she starts speaking her speech will be a bit better' (BR/E3/005)***

Whilst one mother mentioned both her own as well as her child's development as a motivation commenting that:

***'The main thing is development for the baby...plus I'm not from Scotland so I don't know any nursery rhymes so I thought it will be a good way to build up my knowledge' (BR/E3/012)***

- **PRE-EXISTING INTEREST IN/KNOWLEDGE OF ACTIVITY**

19 participants across 6 types of library groups, stated that a pre-existing interest in or knowledge of the activity provided a motivation to join a library group. Many of those participants mentioned an interest in the activity:

***'Well I love walking' (WG/S1/019)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'I've always enjoyed reading' (BG/W3/010)***

Some participants mentioned having previously been in a similar group as motivating joining a library group. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I used to go to something like this when I was a wee guy' (BG/W3/010)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'I've always been part of library groups and I always think that creative writing groups are a huge benefit to people who are just starting out' (CW/W3/002)***

- **SOCIAL**

12 participants across 4 types of library groups, stated that social factors either personally or for their child was a motivating factor in joining a library group. Many of those participants mentioned wanting to meet new people:

***'Eh just getting out and meeting people, mainly that...just social, social activity you know' (WG/S1/013)***

Whilst another participant, who had been caring for a relative for a long period, commented that:

***'I'd not made any new friends in the course of the 12yrs or any new acquaintances so that was basically what drew me out' (BG/W3/001)***

Most mothers mentioned either their own or their child's socialising as a reason they joined a library group. For example, one participant commented that:

***'When I moved here I don't have nobody so I just come to meet new people and also for my baby as well' (BR/W2/001)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'she gets to meet other kids her age. I get to meet other parents as well' (BR/E3/005)***

- **REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION**

11 participants across 5 types of library groups, stated that being recommended or requested to join a library group was a motivating factor. Many of those participants mentioned being recommended the group by someone they knew:

***'I met a friend and she was in the book group and she said you read a book and then discuss it and I said that sounds interesting' (BG/W3/002)***

One participant was motivated to join after a request from a relative, commenting that:

***'It was because my mum is elderly, and she found out about it and so I said I'd go along with her...she was quite keen to go...so I was happy to go with her' (KG/S1/011)***

- **PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

8 participants across 4 types of library groups, stated that a change to their personal circumstances which had resulted in them having more free time such as retirement, maternity leave or the end of caring responsibilities was a motivating factor in joining a

library group. Many of those participants mentioned retirement, for example one person commented that:

***'it was mainly because I had retired, and I didn't want to be sitting around watching daytime tv or something like that so it was really because I had retired'***  
(BG/W3/010)

Whilst some other participants commented on changes to their caring responsibilities, for example one participant commented that:

***'Well I'd given up work to help out with my grandson so my daughter could go back to work...My husband by this time had been made redundant...and he said well while your over at that I'll come to this and watch him. So, win win'***  
(KG/S1/010)

One mother was motivated to join after beginning maternity leave, commenting that:

***'Being off work. Em I was always round people...and I thought um I'm gonna kind of be myself with baby and baby can't talk back to me'*** (BR/E3/010)

- **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

8 participants across 3 types of library groups, mostly social groups, mentioned practical considerations such as cost, location, and safety as motivations for joining a library group.

Some of those participants mentioned cost, for example one participant commented that:

***'I was looking for a book group online and every one I saw...you were to meet in a pub and it was a glass of wine and stuff and I didn't want that...didn't want one that I had to think oh I needed money to go there'*** (BG/W3/003)

Whilst some participants commented on the location of the group as being a motivating factor, for example one participant commented that:

***'I heard that it met at the library, and everybody knows where the library is, so it was a good meeting point'*** (WG/S1/017)

Whilst one participant mentioned safety as being a motivating factor, commenting that:

***'sadly, a lot of my friends don't like walking... I'd never been walks on my own, but I don't feel completely safe out myself'*** (WG/S1/019)

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

8 participants across 2 types of library groups, mentioned their own or their child’s health and wellbeing as motivations for joining a library group. Many of those participants mentioned physical health, for example one participant commented that:

***‘So that’s why I joined, getting out cause I was starting to put on weight...get my fitness level up’ (WG/E1/002)***

And another participant commented that:

***‘it really is something to do in the sense of fitness’ (WG/S1/018)***

Mothers mentioned either their own or their child’s health wellbeing as a reason they joined a library group. For example, one mother commented that:

***‘I think it’s part of what keeps me sane...She went through a stage wherever she got fussy I would just start one of the songs and you know whatever was bothering her went away she was listening to the song’ (BR/E3/012)***

#### 4.3.2.2 Question 1A- How did you find out about it?

34 responses were provided by 31 participants regarding how they found out about a library group the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Library	0	4	1	0	2	6	13
Someone I know	5	3	0	1	1	1	11
Professional Recommendation	1	0	3	4	0	0	8
Advertisement	2	0	0	0	0	0	2

Figure 15: Q1A Coding Summary

- **LIBRARY**

13 participants across 4 types of library groups stated that they found out about a library group either serendipitously or purposively via public libraries. Many of those participants mentioned seeing adverts in library branches with one participant commenting that:

***‘as I was leaving the library there was a notice on the wall saying why don’t you join the book group and I thought well why not’ (BG/W3/001)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘I’ve been going to bounce and rhyme with my baby I saw the advert [for the writing group] and came along’ (CW/W3/002)***

Some participants purposively contacted the library to enquire about available library groups. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I just decided when I was down at the library one day to ask if there was one going here, and it just went from there'*** (BG/S3/005)

Another participant commented that:

***'I just phoned about all the libraries just to see what was round and what was happening, so I got some information that way'*** (BR/E3/010)

Whilst another participant who found out via the library webpage commented that:

***'I was looking for a book group online...So, I just happened to look up the library'***  
(BG/W3/003)

- **SOMEONE I KNOW**

11 participants across 5 types of library groups, most members of social groups, stated that they found out about a library group via someone they knew. Many of those participants found out about the group via a friend who was already a member of the library group, for example one participant commented that:

***'I didn't know these things existed and it just happened i met her...and she said oh I'm missing my walk and my ears pricked up and I says what walk (laughs) I want a walk'*** (WG/S1/019)

Whilst some other participants found out via a relative, for example one participant commented that:

***'My mum came into the library. I think she was going in to get a book or something'*** (LN/W1/004)

- **PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATION**

8 participants across 3 types of library groups, most being members of developmental groups, stated that they found out about a library group via a professional recommendation. Many of those participants found out about the group via a health professional, for example one participant commented that:

***'the midwife has been talking about it for ages, she's like go to the thing so I'm like sure'*** (BR/E3/005)

Another participant commented that:



***'I got advised about it by my OT worker or sorry advocate in the... hospital and she said there's a group going could be right up your street' (LN/S2/001)***

Whilst some other participants found out about a group via employment advisors, for example one participant commented that:

***'my advisor in the job centre that signs me on, she told me about this place' (LN/S2/008)***

- **ADVERTISEMENT**

2 participants from 1 type of library group, stated that they found out about a library group via an advertisement. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I saw an advertisement in The Evening Times, and it was a walking group and they were just like me, with you know anoraks on and that, and I decided you know instead of walking about by myself to start getting to know people' (WG/E1/002)***

#### 4.3.2.3 *Question 1B- How long have you been a member and how often do you attend?*

- **DURATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

37 responses were provided by 34 participants, either via interview or during observation, regarding how long they have been a member of a library group. 9 of the 16 participants who had been members of a library group for less than a year attended groups which had been operating for less than a year or were new parents with a child less than a year old.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Less than 1 YR</b>	2	4	5	3	2	0	16
<b>1-5YRS</b>	6	2	1	2	1	2	14
<b>5-10YRS</b>	1	1	0	0	2	1	5
<b>More than 10YRS</b>	0	0	0	0	0	2	2

Figure 16: Q1B Coding Summary (Duration)

- **FREQUENCY OF ATTENDANCE**

23 responses were provided by 21 participants concerning the frequency with which they attend a library group.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Regularly</b>	5	5	3	0	3	2	18

<b>Fairly Regularly</b>	0	1	1	1	1	0	4
<b>Intermittently</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 17: Q1B Coding Summary (Frequency)

Most participants attend the library group(s) of which they are a member on a regular basis either every week, fortnight, or month as per the specific group frequency. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘I very rarely miss a book group...if I miss one book club a year, so that’s one out of twelve, it’s about all I miss’ (BG/W3/004)***

And another participant commented that:

***‘I go every week unless I’ve got something else on, holidays or anything like that’ (KG/E2/005)***

Some participants stated that they attended a library group fairly regularly. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘We attend quite regularly’ (KG/S1/011)***

Whilst a couple of participants attended a library group intermittently. With one participant commenting that:

***‘I go in runs of attending and not attending...if I miss a week, I might miss three and I get back to, cause I really do enjoy it’ (WG/S1/019)***

### 4.3.2 Question 2 and 2A Participant Responses

40 research participants were asked about their motivations for participating in a specific activity (Q2), with a further 33 participants asked whether they felt they had benefitted from being a member of a library group (Q2A). Not all participants provided an answer and some provided answers for more than one library group.

	<b>WG</b>	<b>KG</b>	<b>BR</b>	<b>LN</b>	<b>CW</b>	<b>BG</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<b>Q2</b>	7	7	6	5	4	7	36
<b>Q2A</b>	6	6	3	8	4	7	34

Figure 18: Q2/2A Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.2.1 Question 2- Why do you x and what does x do for you?

Of the 36 responses provided by 34 participants regarding why they participate in a specific activity the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Health and Wellbeing	7	5	3	3	2	7	27
Development	0	1	4	3	0	2	10
Social	4	2	3	0	0	0	9
Enjoyment	0	2	3	0	1	2	8
Lifelong Interest	0	4	1	0	1	1	7
Creativity	0	2	0	0	4	1	7
Getting Out	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
Helping Others	0	3	0	1	0	0	4

Figure 19: Q2 Coding Summary

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

27 participants across 6 types of library groups, mentioned their own or their child's health and wellbeing as the reason they participate in an activity. Most of those participants mentioned mental health and wellbeing. Many participants felt their activity provided an opportunity for relaxation and escapism, for example one participant commented that:

***'I just love nature, I like looking at the trees. Anything like that relaxes me, it's the only thing that relaxes me. Em cause I suffer from a lot of anxiety and just seeing trees, water great effect for that reason' (WG/S1/013)***

And another participant commented that:

***'See if you've got a problem, maybe worrying about something, if you get into a good book, I can shut off then' (BG/W3/002)***

Several participants found the activity to be 'therapeutic'. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I write a lot of cathartic stuff, writing about my feelings helps' (CW/E2/003)***

And another participant, a mother who had initially felt anxious going out places with her baby, commented that:

***'I think it's like therapy for mums as well, cause you are singing and you are forgetting yourself doing these silly movements so em definitely therapy for mums' (BR/E3/012)***

Some participants found participating in the activity was important for their child's wellbeing. For example, one mother commented that:

***'One to one time, I sing to her to put her to sleep so it encourages sort of like bonding with your baby' (BR/E3/004)***

In addition, several participants took part in their activity for physical health reasons such as fitness and weight loss. For example, one elderly participant commented that:

***'It stretches your muscles, honestly, I think you need to do that when you are old. If you sit down all day you can't move' (KGWG/S1/005)***

- **DEVELOPMENT**

10 participants across 4 types of library groups, mentioned their own or their child's development as the reason they participate in an activity. For example, one participant commented that:

***'It helps me in my day-to-day life and my work and that' (LN/W1/004)***

And another well-educated participant commented that:

***'I have huge chunks of gap in my knowledge... When I was at school it was impossible to do geography and history cause of difficulties of timetabling, so you had to pick...so I'm enjoying catching up with history' (BG/W3/001)***

Many mothers participated in the activity to aid their child's development. For example, one mother commented that:

***'It helps her... come along and develop more and stuff' (BR/W3/003)***

- **SOCIAL**

9 participants across 3 types of library groups, stated that they participate in an activity for social reasons. Some of those participants touched on the idea of isolation for example, one participant commented that:

***'the company, meeting up with different people and talking to them. Finding out you know that you're not alone, you're not lonely and people have just the same problems as you' (WG/E1/002)***

And another participant commented on meeting people with a shared interest:

***'It's interesting to meet other people you know with a similar interest and see the work that they do' (KG/S1/011)***

Many mothers participated in the activity for the social opportunities afforded for themselves and their child. For example, one mother who had lived in the city for less than a year, commented that:

***'Because you know she come to see new people, new friends for me as well'***

*(BR/W3/001)*

- **ENJOYMENT**

8 participants across 4 types of library groups, spoke of enjoying the activity as a reason for participation. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I just enjoy sitting down and reading a good story'*** *(BG/S3/005)*

And another participant, a mother commented that it was something enjoyable to do with a new-born:

***'this one is for new-born so...when he was sleeping, I still got to join in...and he probably is enjoying it even though he is just being a wee lazy bum. I love watching kids' faces how they get so excited, eh and do their own wee actions'*** *(BR/E3/010)*

- **LIFELONG INTEREST**

7 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned a lifelong interest in an activity, often originating in childhood as their reason for participation. Many of those participants commented on the development of this interest in the home or at school. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I learned to knit socks and things at school, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I used to knit for my dolls and things as a child...my mother wouldn't teach me to knit because she was left-handed and she said no I'll just confuse you, so I think my aunt showed me, my godmother...but mostly it was school'*** *(KG/E2/001)*

And another participant commented that:

***'My mum was a singer as well, so singing is a very important thing to me. It's part of my nature I suppose'*** *(BR/E3/012)*

- **CREATIVITY**

7 participants across 2 types of library groups, mentioned creativity or expression as the reason they participate in an activity. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I like the sort of creativity of it as well... I take notions, I'll knit and knit and knit, try different things' (KG/E2/005)***

And another participant commented that:

***'I think it's expression, it's the idea that you are sharing something which is unique to your point of view' (BG/W3/001)***

- **GETTING OUT**

5 participants across 2 types of library groups, mentioned wanting to do something out of the house as a reason they participate in an activity. Most of those participants specifically mentioned being outside in the fresh air. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I am more of an outdoor person than an indoor person... Even like going to the opera or something like that...or a play, if it's outside I still prefer it. It's funny I just prefer being out than in, so walking gives me that opportunity' (WG/S1/019)***

And another participant, a first-time mother who felt it was important to get out with her child, commented that:

***'I think being out has made her a bit more content...she's more alert. I think it's part of me just being out there and sort of just letting her experience things...you do get people with their first baby who just keep them in the house, but me I'm not sort of that person I like to be out there just letting her try new things' (BR/E3/005)***

- **HELPING OTHERS**

4 participants across 2 types of library groups, mentioned wanting to help others as a reason they participate in an activity. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I've knitted eh hats for premature babies and I've knitted hats and scarfs for refugee children, so I feel something that I'm enjoying is maybe being helpful to other people. So, you know that's why' (KG/S1/004)***

And another participant commented that:

***'If I can read and write and that I'll go be a tutor and help other people with their reading and writing, that's what I'll do' (LN/W1/001)***

#### 4.3.2.2 Question 2A- Do you feel you have benefitted from being a member of the group and if so how?

34 Responses were provided by 33 participants who felt they had benefitted from being a member of a library group, the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Social	3	5	1	2	1	4	16
Development	1	0	2	8	1	1	13
Health and Wellbeing	3	1	1	1	2	2	10
Scheduled Activity	1	0	2	0	0	4	7
Finding out about other things	0	1	0	0	0	2	3

Figure 20: Q2A Coding Summary

#### • **SOCIAL**

16 participants across 6 types of library groups, stated that the opportunities for socialisation provided by library groups was a benefit of membership. Several participants mentioned the importance of library groups in relation to isolation, for example one participant commented that:

***‘they discuss other things and I feel I’m not so isolated. I’ve got good family right enough... But coming up here I think I need it, really need it cause its different conversations you know in my age group’ (BG/S3/002)***

And another participant commented:

***‘Oh I do definitely... And you feel there’s a couple there that are quite lonely... you feel as if you are maybe putting something back...one of the women... when she came, she was an absolute nervous wreck... she really wouldn’t speak but she has really came out of her shell’ (KG/E2/007)***

Several participants mentioned making new friends. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘Yes well people are all very nice very friendly, so I’ve made new friends’ (BG/W3/005)***

Some participants felt the opportunities for socialising both during the group activity and on other occasions was a benefit. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Yeah, uh huh, because we have a wee coffee after and you know it's a wee social group and we have a wee thing at Christmas and so it's good you get to know everybody' (WG/S1/013)***

A couple of participants felt the opportunities for socialising locally within the community was a benefit. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Oh aye definitely and that would be first the different people you meet, local people, eh cause it's a local group' (BG/W3/006)***

- **DEVELOPMENT**

13 participants across 5 types of library groups, stated that they felt their own or their child's development was a benefit of library group membership. Some participants felt the group enabled their development. For example, one participant after attending a library group for the first time commented that:

***'I actually wrote something, and I couldn't believe it those 250 odd words apart from letters em and maybe a couple of speeches over the years, that's the first time I've actually put anything on paper' (BG/W3/004)***

Another participant, a mother, commented that:

***'Definitely big time... [my child] actually took her first steps there and I think it was because she was encouraged seeing other babies walking. She literally hadn't taken one step and then I was putting my boots back on and I looked over and she was away, not just like one step but she just walked' (BR/E3/012)***

One participant stated that library group membership had been more conducive to their development than more formal settings commenting that:

***'Yeah I have, cause I came here when I was at college and I didn't like college, so I didn't see the point in going. I didn't like the teachers and they didn't like me and then I came here, and I got help so I like it...I wouldn't go to another group so I wouldn't' (LN/W1/004)***

Some participants mentioned personal development, for example one participant commented that:

***'Yes definitely. Ay just the fact that years ago I wouldn't have walked into ay a group of strangers...and sit myself down, but now I've no problem at all doing that***



***sort of thing. That was about the first time I'd gone without somebody you know without saying to a friend will we try this. I thought no I'll try this on my own'***  
(BG/W3/010)

Another participant, commented on the benefits of development in their daily life commenting that:

***'Well, I do cause when we are going to Sainsburys I can read things on the boards and all that as well now... i went down to Seaton Sands a couple of days ago and I could write it all down even looking at the form now and getting through on the telephone, so I feel that's helped me too'*** (LN/S2/004)

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

10 participants across 6 types of library groups, stated their health or wellbeing had benefitted because of library group membership. Most of those participants felt their mental health and wellbeing benefitted. For example, one participant who had suffered an accident at work commented that:

***'It brought me back to my normal self...when that happened to me in my work, I kinda I was a bit down and whatever, so I've started to be myself and more outgoing...Whereas I wasn't like that for a couple of year and so it's brought all everything back to me and I love it'*** (WG/E1/007)

Another participant, who felt both their physical and mental health had benefitted, commented that:

***'I think my health has improved and I have lost weight and em I find now when I don't, I can't manage my walk for some reason it can put me in a wee downer. So, I just love getting up in the morning knowing that I'm going on my walk, it's just a different attitude you know you're not stuck in the house'*** (WG/E1/002)

- **SCHEDULED ACTIVITY**

7 participants across 3 types of library groups, felt that having a scheduled activity was a benefit of library group membership. Some participants felt a benefit from having a 'purpose' For example, one retired participant commented that:

***'it gives you a purpose doesn't it going to the library. You have to make sure you leave on that day to go and whatever'*** (BG/W3/005)

This was echoed by another retired participant, who commented that:

***‘Oh yes absolutely. It’s taking me out. On a regular basis I have to make some kind of effort to read the book, it’s a kind of discipline’ (BG/W3/001)***

Some participants felt they benefitted from having something enjoyable to look forward to.

For example, one participant commented that:

***‘I do yeah because I enjoy it so much. It’s my monthly thing I look forward to’ (BG/W3/003)***

- **FINDING OUT ABOUT OTHER THINGS**

3 participants across 2 types of library groups, felt that a benefit of library group membership was finding out about other things through the group. All of those participants highlighted that group conversations are not limited to the group activity. For example, one retired participant commented that:

***‘I think too being retired...you’ve got all the wee stories have you seen this is going on or that going on... Or maybe it’s some discussion about eh changes in retired things pensions or things like that so you are kept up to date what’s available and these sorts of things’ (BG/W3/006)***

### 4.3.3 Question 3 Participant Responses

41 research participants were asked why they perform a specific activity (walk, knit, learn, sing, read, write) as part of a group. 40 Responses were provided by 38 participants and 3 participants provided no answer.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
<b>Q3</b>	8	7	5	6	6	8	40

Figure 21: Q3 Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.3.1 Question 3- Why x as part of a group?

Of the 40 responses provided by 38 participants as to why they X as part of a library group the main themes identified were social and developmental:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Company/Interaction (Social)</b>	5	3	4	0	0	3	15
<b>Friendship/Support (Social)</b>	1	1	1	0	0	2	5
<b>Better with others (Social)</b>	2	0	1	1	0	0	4
<b>Enabling (Social)</b>	4	0	0	0	0	0	4

To get help (Developmental)	0	5	0	4	1	0	10
Encouragement/Motivation (Developmental)	4	1	0	0	1	2	8
To progress (Developmental)	1	0	0	1	2	0	4
Try new things (Developmental)	0	1	0	0	0	3	4

Figure 22: Q3 Coding Summary

- **SOCIAL- COMPANY/INTERACTION**

15 participants across 4 types of library groups, mentioned participating in an activity as part of a group to **'socialise'**. For many participants having company was important for example, one participant commented that:

***'Company..., they are a mixed bunch and I mean some are terribly interesting and others just sit like, I shouldn't say it but they just sit like bags of washing at the steamie and they are obviously there for the same reason'*** (BG/W3/001)

Another participant, commented that:

***'It was just for the company more than anything...when you are on your own it's good to get out'*** (KG/S1/005)

Some participants mentioned that group activity encouraged interaction and conversation. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I think it's a good way of interacting with other people... even if it's just conversation'*** (BG/W3/006)

Some parents mentioned groups as providing an opportunity for both them and their child to meet other people. For example, one ESOL parent commented that:

***'she is alone with me, only with me in the house she can communicate with other people'*** (BR/W2/001)

- **SOCIAL- FRIENDSHIP & SUPPORT**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups, mentioned library groups as providing friendship and support. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Friendship...everyone is quite good within the group at providing help to each other and support em during illness or situation like that'*** (KG/E2/007)

Another participant, a parent, commented that:

*'Friendship as well for the babies cause obviously like she'll know them from a very young age and obviously for me to meet new mums...I've made loads of friend[s]'*  
(BR/E3/005)

- **SOCIAL- BETTER WITH OTHERS**

4 participants across 3 types of library groups, none of which cultural, mentioned a specific activity as being better as part of a group. For example, one participant commented that:

*'Em with other people eh it's better sitting in a group everybody's the same you can understand each other'* (LN/S2/001)

Another participant, a parent, commented that:

*'So, it's good sitting here and singing to her cause she loves it. But then I suppose it's better when you get to speak to other adults, and she gets to be with other kids'* (BR/E3/004)

- **SOCIAL- ENABLING**

4 participants from 1 type of library group, mentioned groups as enabling them to participate in an activity which would be difficult to do alone due to health and safety concerns. For example, one participant commented that:

*'Some places we walk...you definitely wouldn't walk on your own...So I'm getting places that I haven't seen before, for all I've lived in Scotland all my life'*  
(WG/E1/002)

Another participant, commented that:

*'I'm diabetic so it is good to have the support of people of there was any medical emergency who can help'* (WG/S1/017)

- **DEVELOPMENT- TO GET HELP**

10 participants across 3 types of library groups, mentioned needing help or providing help to others in relation to a specific activity as a reason why they do the activity as part of a library group. Most of those participants saw being able to obtain help from group members as important. For example, one participant commented that:

*'knitting can be a solitary activity and you don't really need to be part of a group, but then it's nice to have someone there that can help you if you get stuck and there's such a wide experience of knitters in the group that there's somebody who*

*can kinda help em if you are not too sure about something so it's useful in that respect, educative as well' (KG/S1/011)*

Another participant, commented that:

*'We try and help each other so that's what's good about learning as part of a group. If we can help with something we will help them out' (LN/S2/007)*

- **DEVELOPMENT- ENCOURAGEMENT/MOTIVATION**

8 participants across 4 types of library groups, none of which developmental, mentioned needing encouragement or motivation in relation to a specific activity as a reason why they do the activity as part of a library group. Most of those participants saw the group as providing motivation. For example, one participant commented that:

*'It makes me read (laughs) otherwise I would get lazy about it and possibly get bored halfway through or something and not read the book' (BG/W3/005)*

Another participant, commented that:

*'if you are on your own you go so far and just turn back whereas if you are with a group...you know you are going to go all the way round the loch and there's no point in just going a wee bit and turning back' (WG/E1/002)*

Some participants mentioned the encouragement provided by group members as a motivating factor. For example, one participant commented that:

*'We give each other boosts' (CW/E2/003)*

- **DEVELOPMENT- PROGRESS**

4 participants across 3 types of library groups, mentioned a group atmosphere as aiding progress with an activity. For example, one participant commented that:

*'When I was young I couldn't do all this, I was always the class clown...I used to get papped in separate classes one on one and then the more I got older I'm just starting to obviously get into groups and that's me happy now. I can start to talk instead of talking to just one person' (LN/S2/008)*

- **DEVELOPMENT- TRY NEW THINGS**

4 participants across 2 types of library groups, none of which developmental, mentioned wanting to try something new as a reason why they do the activity as part of a library group. For example, one participant commented that:

*'I think it often makes you read books you don't normally read, and you'll appreciate books more because you're reading books that you don't normally read cause one time I'd have just read a thriller and now I've read sci-fi and love stories'*  
(BG/S3/005)

#### 4.3.4 Question 4 Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked what their membership in a library group brings to their routine. 38 Responses were provided by 38 participants and 4 participants provided an answer which was unclear.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
Q4	7	7	5	7	4	8	38

Figure 23: Q4 Interview Responses Summary

##### 4.3.4.1 *Question 4- Thinking about other regular commitments you may have (work, friends, family, and hobbies) what would you say the group brings to your routine?*

Of the 38 responses provided by 38 participants as to what the library group brings to their routine, the main themes identified were that the library group is:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Part of the routine	4	1	4	3	3	4	19
Enjoyment	3	4	1	4	0	1	13
Social activity	3	5	1	2	0	0	11
Something to look forward to	1	3	0	3	0	3	10
Something different	2	2	0	2	1	2	9
Gets me out	2	2	2	0	1	1	8
Wellbeing	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
Development	0	0	1	1	0	0	2

Figure 24: Q4 Coding Summary

- **PART OF THE ROUTINE**

19 participants across 6 types of library groups, mentioned attending the library group as being a part of their routine. Many participants viewed attending the group as a fixed part of the routine. For example, one participant commented that:

*'That is our routine, we know we will be doing nothing on [that day] ... because we have the walk. You know it's not something I would ever, if somebody said let's go for coffee I'd say I can't make [that day]'* (WG/S1/017)

Another participant, a parent, commented that:

***'after I start to come this is my schedule on Friday I have it in my mind that I have to come here, unless I have an appointment like with the GP or something'***

*(BR/W2/001)*

Many participants regarded the group simply as being a part of their routine which 'fits in' with other things. For example, one participant, commented that:

***'It's part of the routine now as we go to the sensory class on a Thursday and come here on a Friday...it's good for us both to do, cause I don't really do much anyhow'***

*(BR/W2/003)*

Some participants stated that the group provided a set activity to participate in with a family member as part of their routine. For example, one participant commented that:

***'in some ways I prefer not to be tied down to things, but for my mums' sake I go once a fortnight...it's good to have that activity to do with her because you know it avoids em having to think up places to go and things to do (laughs)'*** *(KG/S1/011)*

- **ENJOYMENT**

13 participants across 5 types of library groups, mostly social groups, mentioned the library group as being something they enjoy within their routine. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I enjoy it, I really enjoy going. I enjoy all the patter and you know some weeks we are in absolute stitches laughing and other weeks...it's quite quiet'*** *(KG/E2/005)*

Another participant commented that:

***'When you come in you feel down, then when you leave you are happy, you are laughing'*** *(LN/W1/003)*

And another participant commented that:

***'it's definitely a wee high point in my week, I know that sounds rather sad'***

*(WG/S1/019)*

- **SOCIAL ACTIVITY**

11 participants across 4 types of library groups, none of which cultural, mentioned social aspects of the group as bringing something to their routine. For example, one participant commented that:

***'It's a nice group...a sense of camaraderie...it's more of a social occasion'***

***(KG/E2/005)***

Another participant commented that:

***'I know everybody now that's sat here you know what I mean, plus I get on with everybody so it helps' (LN/S2/008)***

Another participant felt the opportunity for company provided through attending the group brought more to their routine than the activity itself commenting that:

***'I'm on my own, completely you know...I haven't got anyone here, so going out there and being able to speak to people to me it's great. More than anything it's the company, although the knitting ok it's doing some good for somebody, but to me it's the company' (KG/S1/005)***

Whilst a mother mentioned the importance of socialising with other people for her child, commenting that:

***'it's good cause she is alone with me, only with me in the house, she can communicate with other people' (BR/W2/001)***

- **SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO**

10 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned attending the library group as being something in their routine they look forward to. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I think it's just something I look forward to, em it gives me pleasure...that I am going to be going to the group' (KG/S1/004)***

Another participant commented that:

***'how could I put it, well I'm not, family and friends are alright, they are kind of how can I put it an obligation. I find this is not an obligation this is something I look forward to and enjoy' (WG/E1/002)***

- **SOMETHING DIFFERENT**

9 participants across 5 types of library groups mentioned their membership of a library group as providing something different to their routine. For example, one retired participant commented that:



***'It's something different...in comparison to shop every day, housework'***

*(BG/S3/005)*

Whilst another participant, who is currently unemployed, commented that:

***'I'm glad to come here, cause Monday to Friday I'm usually always doing job searches'*** *(LN/S2/008)*

Some participants mentioned their membership of a library group as being something just for them out with their family commitments. For example, one participant commented that:

***'It's just something for me because everything else I've got to do is with family. I don't work, everything else I feel is like my family I have to count them into everything I do and sometimes I'm like I want something just for me and I've got this just for me'*** *(BG/W3/003)*

And another participant, who had recently become a mother, commented that:

***'I was coming into the group to escape (laughs) cause you know it is really difficult having a baby eh they are with you twenty four seven...you know it's quite hard just to get mental space so coming along to a group is actually really nice'***  
*(CW/W3/002)*

- **GETS ME OUT**

8 participants across 5 types of library groups, mostly social groups, mentioned the group as something within their routine which gets them out of the house. For example, one participant commented that:

***'It gets me out of the house...If it wasn't for that I wouldn't be outta the house'***  
*(KG/E2/001)*

Another participant commented that:

***'It forces me to get out...it's a discipline. I may not read the book, but I come down [laughs]'*** *(BG/W3/001)*

- **WELLBEING**

4 participants from 2 types of library groups mentioned attending the group as part of their routine as of benefit to their wellbeing. 3 participants mentioned their membership of a library group as providing exercise to their routine. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Em it gives me a wee bit of exercise' (WG/E1/007)***

Whilst one participant saw attending as providing an opportunity for personal progression and a mechanism of re-entering the community commenting that:

***'I've got to start looking for a place in the community be it in a care home or supported accommodation, so I've been going to different groups for the past say what two months say, before that I was sitting on my fat arse on the ward all day... I do things now... I enjoy myself now... I do enjoy these groups... It restores your sense of worth, sense of ability you know' (LN/S1/001)***

- **DEVELOPMENT**

2 participants from 2 types of library groups mentioned the group as providing an opportunity for development within their routine. For example, one mother commented in relation to their child:

***'sometimes at home I just start singing, she just starts smiling cause she sort of knows the song so yeah she's sort of like aware' (BR/E3/005)***

#### 4.3.5 Question 5 Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked whether through membership in a library group(s) they had become aware of or been recommended anything else they had tried. 36 responses were provided by 34 participants and 8 participants provided no answer. 30 participants stated that they had, and 4 participants stated that they had not.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
<b>Q5</b>	9	6	5	4	4	8	36

Figure 25: Q5 Interview Responses Summary

#### ***4.3.5.1 Question 5- Through membership of the group have you become aware of or been recommended any other things you have tried such as: other groups, activities, places, movies, plays, museums?***

Of the examples provided by 30 participants as to what they had become aware of/been recommended through membership of a library group(s) the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Cultural Opportunities</b>	1	2	1	3	1	4	12
<b>Other Groups</b>	1	2	4	0	2	1	10
<b>Events &amp; Activities</b>	2	3	0	0	0	2	7

<b>Learning &amp; Development</b>	1	1	0	3	0	1	6
<b>Local Places &amp; Services</b>	3	1	1	0	0	0	5
<b>Social Opportunities</b>	3	0	0	0	0	0	3

Figure 26: Q5 Coding Summary

- **CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES**

12 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that they had become aware of/been recommended through their membership of a library group public libraries mentioned cultural events, objects or places within their answer. Many participants specifically mentioned cultural events for example, one participant commented that:

***‘that poem thing...talking about what our parents had been doing in their time...it was interesting, there was this comedian...it was him that wrote down my wee eh poem thing and he said it in a funny way it was good’ (LN/W1/003)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘Well the wee books that they’ve gave me a couple of times I’ve flicked through them and there’s been things like going to art things’ (BG/W3/003)***

Some participants also mentioned finding out about books through various library groups, for example one participant commented:

***‘Books we talk about because we are in the library...that’s a good thing...we can share that kind of knowledge’ (KG/S1/004)***

Another participant commented that:

***‘Sometimes they’ll recommend books but I’m not a big reader, but I do take on board people’s suggestions’ (CW/E2/003)***

Some participants mentioned finding out about cultural places, for example one participant commented:

***‘oh, they tell all different museums and things like that they’ve been to and sometimes I’ll go’ (BG/W3/002)***

Another participant commented that:

***‘We went to the Burrell Collection...with the group. I’d never been before, and they took us round. That was very interesting to see’ (LN/S2/007)***

Whilst another participant commented on becoming aware of other cultural places within their local community commenting that:

***'Just on the way back from Bounce and Rhyme the other day the Womens Library handed me their booklet and I've always been quite curious about that place, and I've just been looking through the booklet and they've got lots of interesting events happening...so I think I might be popping in there'*** (BR/E3/012)

- **OTHER GROUPS**

10 participants across 5 types of library groups who stated that they had become aware of/been recommended other groups because of their membership of a library group. Most parents mentioned finding out about other parent and child groups, for example one mother commented that:

***'Em well thanks to the library we now go to a playgroup...so I do find things out from them. I like the community aspect of it that I get leaflets from there'***  
(BR/E3/012)

Some participants specifically mentioned other library groups, one participant commented that:

***'It was through the walking group I heard about the knitting group and through the exercise class...I've gone to an art class, it just passes along you know'***  
(KG/S1/005)

Whilst other participants mentioned other groups out with the library, one participant commented that:

***'I started line dancing because of the group. It was one of the girls...she only went every now and again and it was something that I'd been thinking about, so I went with her, and I've been going ever since'*** (BG/S3/005)

- **EVENTS & ACTIVITIES**

7 participants across 3 types of library groups, mainly social groups, stated that they had become aware of/been recommended events. Most of those participants mentioned finding out about events related to the activity of the group, for example one participant commented that:

***'Aye well we've gone to Watt Brothers through it, em and we go to the craft fair as well' (KG/E2/001)***

And another participant commented that:

***'Well they mention different quiz nights and things, but I haven't gone to anything like that' (BG/W3/005)***

- **LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT**

6 participants across 4 types of library groups, stated that they had become aware of/been recommended opportunities for learning and development. Many of those participants mentioned attending computer courses within the library, for example one participant commented that:

***'computer classes...it was showing us all the basics...showing us how to play games...and the iPad, showing us how to work that and go into art galleries and all they things' (LN/W1/001)***

Some of those participants mentioned finding out about courses relating to a specific health concern, for example one participant commented that:

***'College for a mad thing for Dyslexia' (LN/W1/004)***

- **LOCAL PLACES & SERVICES**

5 participants across 3 types of library groups, mainly social groups, stated that they had become aware of/been recommended local places and services. Many of those participants mentioned finding out about places they could go locally, for example one new mother commented that:

***'there was a lady...she had written a whole load of places that I can go with him and the times...you do get a lot of information' (BR/E3/010)***

One recently retired participant mentioned finding out about a local befriending service, commenting that:

***'there was a notice up about...taking old folk out to tea and I wouldn't mind that once a month I think I could do it... i'm just retired so I'm getting round to organising...I'm quite into community things so I think that library particularly is really good at advertising possible things to do' (WG/S1/019)***

- **SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES**

3 participants from 1 type of library social group stated that they had become aware of/been recommended opportunities for socialisation. All those participants mentioned finding out about opportunities for socialising with group members out with the group activity, for example one participant commented that:

*‘some of the ladies is in a choir...they have a concert every year... when possible, I go to that...it’s lovely, I mean I thought oh god a choir but nothing like what I imagined’ (WG/S1/013)*

Whilst a retired participant, receiving the basic state pension commented that:

*‘There is other social things, there definitely is...they said to me the other day they are going to... Blackpool and would I like to go, so I’m considering that... But that’s the only downside for me, I’d love to join in things but I was upfront with them and said it’s not that I’m being standoffish, I says the bottom line is I can’t afford it’ (WG/E1/002)*

- **NO BUT I PASS THINGS ALONG**

2 of the 10 participants who stated that they hadn’t become aware of/been recommended anything because of their membership in a library group mentioned however making others aware of things. For example, one participant commented that:

*‘Em I often introduce people to things...I automatically pick up leaflets and eh hand them onto different people eh use them myself’ (BG/S3/006)*

#### 4.3.6 Question 6 Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked whether they thought that the library was a good venue for their group: 31 participants stated that they thought the library was a good venue. 3 participants stated that whilst the library provided a good venue their group could be held in an alternative venue and 1 participant stated that their group size impacted on the suitability of the library as a venue. 7 participants did not provide an answer.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
Q6	7	5	5	6	5	7	35

Figure 27: Q6 Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.6.1 Question 6- Do you think that the library is a good venue for this group?

Of the 35 responses provided by 35 participants as to whether they thought the library provided a good venue for their group the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Atmosphere	5	5	3	0	1	4	18
Practical	7	3	0	0	3	2	15
Additional Services	2	1	3	2	1	3	12
Appropriate	0	2	2	4	1	1	10
Safety/Familiarity	1	2	0	0	1	1	5
Other Venues could also be used	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
Size of group a factor	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Figure 28: Q6 Coding Summary

- **ATMOSPHERE**

18 participants across 5 types of library groups who stated that public libraries provided a good venue for their group focused on the atmosphere in the library within their answer.

For example, one participant commented that:

***‘there is a nice atmosphere...some places you go into you don’t feel comfortable, but it’s comfortable’ (KG/E2/005)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘I just think it’s very relaxing and free. For example, with me breast feeding I can just be free and just feed her...it’s very comfortable...so I think it’s a very good place to do it’ (BR/E3/005)***

Half of those participants specifically mentioned the friendliness of library staff within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘these people here who are very busy have us a hot water thing for our tea...they supply the water and that makes us feel welcome cause some people have got no time for old people’ (BG/W3/002)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘I think the standard of librarians has improved a lot. Well, em, they used to have some that were maybe not as helpful...they are friendly, they are helpful, the likes***

***of [staff member name removed] you know cottoning on to what I like and ordering books for me of authors that I've never heard of, so she is introducing me to different books, authors' (KG/S1/004)***

Some participants specifically mentioned what they perceived to be as changes in public libraries within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I always remember libraries you couldn't talk. You weren't allowed to make a noise and I mean the slightest noise. Well, we are all here and we gab gab gab which is fine you know' (WG/E1/007)***

Whilst another participant commented on the impact of these changes:

***'Yeah, I mean I'm astonished at the changes in libraries. When I was young it was a silent place and you didn't speak...now that I am used to it, I don't mind at all. It makes it very sociable and lively and it's nice that people don't feel intimidated by the atmosphere and that they feel that they can participate in what's going on readily without kind of waiting for someone to tap their shoulder' (KG/S1/011)***

Whilst another participant commented:

***'libraries years ago to now definitely improved, they make you want to go in. Years ago they didn't.'* (BR/E3/010)**

- **PRACTICAL**

15 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that public libraries provided a good venue for their group focused on practical considerations such as location, cost, available facilities, and size within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I would say it's good for us, it's a central location it's part of the community' (KG/E2/007)***

Whilst another participant commented on the importance of the free services libraries offer within communities:

***'Yes, I think em given that it doesn't cost anything and I think that when people retire [there are] financial restraints...so I think this is where the library plays a huge part in em keeping all sorts of age groups active and interested' (CW/W3/004)***



Whilst another participant commented on the importance of the facilities libraries provide within communities:

***'we've got the facility of the toilet and they kinda things and it's really good. It's made a difference to our walking group I think, a big difference' (WG/E1/007)***

- **ADDITIONAL SERVICES**

12 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that public libraries provided a good venue for their group mentioned additional benefits of having the group in the library. For example, some participants mentioned the increased awareness of library services. With one participant commenting:

***'you pick up that there are other things...so it's also a springboard into other things for people as well' (WG/S1/017)***

And another participant commented that:

***'when you come over here there's other things you pick up or the likes of any wee courses if you wanted to do that. I think one of the times we done the iPad...we said oh we'll go to that...so it keeps you thingy with what's going on in the library' (BG/W3/006)***

Some participants mentioned having access to library resources whilst attending the group within their answer. One participant commented that:

***'I think it's a good place because then I always take books as well, so it makes me borrow books for her' (BR/E3/012)***

And another participant commented that:

***'Em several others, not including myself, who don't have computers at home, they make use of the computers which are here... Em if you want there's more books you can take home as well' (BG/W3/001)***

- **APPROPRIATE**

10 participants across 5 types of library groups who stated that public libraries provided a good venue for their group mentioned the library as being an appropriate venue for their group activity within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Yeah, it's ideal let's be honest. I mean obviously you do reading in the group so it makes sense to have it in the library' (LN/S2/001)***

And another participant commented that:

***'Yeah...because obviously they've got the books and stuff it encourages young children to read' (BR/W2/003)***

Some participants mentioned the importance of having access to set areas within the library for groups within their answer. One participant commented that:

***'Yes I do it's very much well placed. It's quiet but have their own wee set areas for babies and parents' (BR/E3/010)***

And another participant commented that:

***'Well in here [separate within the library] the library is good for learning how to read and write and out there [main library area] ...seeing all the books' (LN/W1/001)***

- **SAFETY/FAMILIARITY**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that public libraries provided a good venue for their group mentioned libraries as providing safe familiar spaces within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'it made me feel quite secure about what kind of group it might be... Because it was a library in a place I vaguely knew I felt yeah it's ok, it did add that feeling of ease' (WG/S1/019)***

Whilst another participant commented on the benefit of an increased familiarity with the library from attending the group:

***'Going to the knitting group means I think if you had a question for the library, you would come in and ask it easier because you sort of been here before and know it. It's very hard to sort of come and ask, I think it's hard for most people to come and ask something you are not sure of to strangers you'd rather ask somebody you have met and spoken to' (KG/S1/010)***

- **OTHER VENUES COULD ALSO BE USED**

3 participants across 3 types of library groups stated that venues other than public libraries would also be well suited to their group. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I think so. But it could be in someone's home just as easily couldn't it, we could take turns each' (BG/W3/004)***

And another participant commented:

*'It's alright aye, could be anywhere I wouldn't really care. This is the only time I go into libraries, I don't like libraries' (LN/W1/004)*

• **SIZE OF GROUP A FACTOR**

1 participant stated that the size of their group impacted on the suitability of the library as a venue commenting that:

*'Can be, though at times not enough space depending on how many people are in the group' (CW/E2/007)*

**4.3.7 Question 7 Participant Responses**

42 research participants were asked whether they used public libraries for anything other than the group. 22 participants stated that they used public libraries out with the group, 12 participants occasionally used public libraries and 8 participants did not use public libraries for anything other than attending the group.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
<b>Q7</b>	7	7	6	9	5	8	42

Figure 29: Q7 Interview Responses Summary

**4.3.7.1 Question 7- Do you use public libraries for anything other than the group?**

Of the 42 responses provided by 42 participants regarding their public library use out with attending a library group the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Accessing Resources (Regular/Occasional Use)</b>	3	6	4	3	3	5	24
<b>Place to go with others (Regular/Occasional Use)</b>	1	2	4	1	1	1	10
<b>Development (Regular/Occasional Use)</b>	0	2	0	2	0	2	6
<b>Other Groups (Regular/Occasional Use)</b>	0	1	2	1	2	0	6
<b>Information (Regular/Occasional Use)</b>	1	0	1	1	0	2	5
<b>Previous Use (Occasional/ No Use)</b>	1	0	0	2	2	1	6
<b>Providing Own Resources (Occasional/ No Use)</b>	2	1	1	0	0	1	5
<b>No Time (Occasional/ No Use)</b>	0	0	0	0	1	2	3

Figure 30: Q7 Coding Summary

- **ACCESSING RESOURCES**

24 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries either regularly or occasionally out with the group, mentioned accessing library resources. Book borrowing was the most popular activity with the majority of participants who use public libraries on a regular basis. For example, one participant, a mother, commented that she borrows books for her children:

***'We borrow books, like my older wee girl, more from the...Gaelic selection at the Mitchell Library...I've started borrowing books for her [baby]' (BR/E3/004)***

Whilst some participants who used libraries occasionally also mentioned book borrowing for example one participant, a member of two library groups, commented that:

***'Occasionally I'll take a book out, I don't really read as much as I used to...I think now with doing all these other activities I'm too tired to read at night' (KG/S1/005)***

Some participants mentioned accessing library equipment such as computers or photocopiers. For example, one retired participant commented:

***'That's one of my great things the photocopier...it's often for different wee things for my history group...you know I find it a great resource. And there's no many in shops now, but this is a nicer place to come to. You can sit and do it yourself, futter about when you are no too sure of these machines' (BG/S3/006)***

And another participant commented:

***'sometimes I print out things, go on Facebook to keep in touch with my family' (CW/E3/003)***

Some participants who used libraries regularly mentioned using library computers previously but no longer having the need as they now have their own, for example one participant commented that:

***'When I never used to have internet in the house, I used to use the computers a lot' (BR/E3/004)***

Accessing printers or photocopiers was the most popular activity with most participants who use public libraries occasionally. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Not so much, sometimes I come up and I use the computer just because our printers out' (BG/S3/003)***

- **PLACE TO GO WITH OTHERS**

10 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries regularly or occasionally out with the group, mentioned using libraries as place to go with others. Some participants mentioned libraries as a place to socialise. For example, one participant, a mother, commented:

***‘sometimes just to meet friends, things like this in a café and just socialise and speak to people’ (BR/E3/005)***

Some participants mentioned using libraries when looking after children/grandchildren. For example, one participant commented:

***‘they had a wee group on during the summer holidays last year a craft group and I babysit for my friends’ kids...I had them during the holidays on a Wednesday so I took them to that and oh they absolutely loved it...I probably would use it for other activities with kids’ (KG/E2/005)***

- **OTHER GROUPS**

6 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries either regularly or occasionally out with the group, mentioned using libraries for other groups. For example, one participant commented:

***‘Oh yeah I mean I come for bounce and rhyme’ (CW/W3/002)***

- **DEVELOPMENT**

6 participants across 3 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries either regularly or occasionally outwith the group, mentioned having used libraries for learning. Most of those participants mentioned completing computing courses in the library. For example, one participant commented:

***‘I’ve just done the tablet course so I suppose you could say that’s studying... and I’ve done the computer courses em word and I can’t remember but there’s been a few courses I’ve gone too’ (KG/S1/004)***

- **INFORMATION**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries either regularly or occasionally out with the group, mentioned using libraries for information. For example, one participant commented:

***'If there's a place I've never been before I like to find out about it and maybe get some history, travel information about the area and stuff, tell me places to go and stuff' (LN/S2/007)***

- **PREVIOUS USE**

6 participants across 5 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries occasionally or not at all outwith the group, mentioned having previously used libraries. For example, one participant commented on childhood use:

***'I don't really use them outwith the group to be honest... as a boy we had a library on our scheme and it used to lend records/LPs. I used that when I was a boy but after that no' (LN/S2/001)***

Whilst some participants mentioned previous use with family. For example, one participant commented:

***'I used to bring my two boys...I used to read at bedtime books from the library...but they are all grown up now' (BG/W3/003)***

- **PROVIDING OWN RESOURCES**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries occasionally or not at all outwith the group, mentioned providing their own physical or electronic resources. For example, one participant commented:

***'we do the kindle and...we are well catered for without going to the library you know with amazon and things like that it's not a problem, or getting books out of charity shops' (WG/S1/018)***

Whilst another participant commented:

***'I used to come for the computers but I don't tend to do that now as I've got all that now' (BR/W2/003)***

- **NO TIME**

3 participants across 2 types of library groups who stated that they used public libraries occasionally or not at all outwith the group, mentioned having no time. For example, one participant commented:

***'it's a time factor fitting everything in really' (BG/W3/005)***

### 4.3.8 Question 8, 8A, 8B and 8C Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked about their childhood experiences with public libraries with questions focusing on use (Q8), encouragement (Q8A), enjoyment (Q8B), and perceived differences (Q8C).

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
<b>Q8</b>	7	7	6	7	5	8	40
<b>Q8A</b>	3	7	5	2	5	7	29
<b>Q8B</b>	3	6	3	1	4	5	22
<b>Q8C</b>	3	7	3	0	3	5	21

Figure 31: Q8/8A/8B/8C Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.8.1 Question 8- Did you use public libraries as a child?

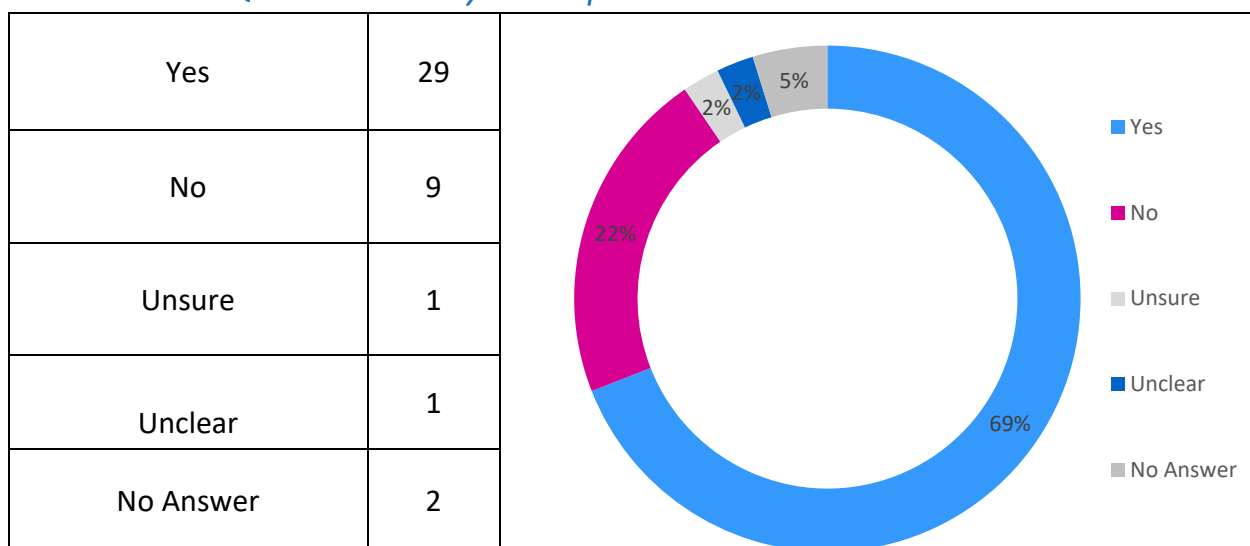


Figure 32: Q8 Response Summary

#### 4.3.8.2 Question 8A- Were you encouraged to do so?

Of the 29 participants who stated they were (19) or were not (10) encouraged to use public libraries as a child the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Taken by a Parent (Yes)</b>	0	3	1	0	1	2	7
<b>Home Environment (Yes)</b>	1	3	1	0	0	2	7
<b>Book Buying (Yes)</b>	1	2	0	0	0	1	4
<b>Home Environment (No)</b>	1	0	1	1	0	2	5
<b>Book Buying (No)</b>	1	0	1	2	0	1	5

Figure 33: Q8A Coding Summary

- **TAKEN TO THE LIBRARY BY A PARENT (YES)**

7 participants across 4 types of library groups who had been encouraged to use public libraries as a child mentioned being taken to the library by a parent. Most of those participants mentioned being taken by their mother. For example, one participant commented that:

*'I was taken there every week at the weekend, em so it's always been part of my life' (KG/S1/004)*

Whilst another participant commented that:

*'I was (laughs), well yeah I mean I used to come every week with my mum and eh during the easter and summer and Christmas holidays there was always events on... lots of kids would come and play like trivial pursuit or something like that and it would be led by librarians and things but it would be a way of getting kids into the library which is really good' (BR/W3/002)*

- **HOME ENVIRONMENT (YES)**

7 participants across 4 types of library groups who had been encouraged to use public libraries as a child mentioned the home environment, either the one they grew up in or subsequently created as a parent. Many of those participants mentioned taking their own children to public libraries. For example, one participant commented that:

*'I took my children to the library. They all had library cards pre-school they all had library cards. Now they have things for babies and my daughter...brought my grandson to bounce and rhyme...so she has carried it on and he's got a library ticket' (KG/S1/010)*

Whilst another participant, a new mother who moved to the UK as a teenager, commented that:

*'I was encouraged to do so by my parents, em I think that's why I like books...obviously having been brought up in Africa myself until I was about 12...things like bounce and rhyme and all that is not there so it makes you appreciate it more because like you can actually see how they help at home...that's what I wanted for her [my baby]. I made myself say when we have kids, I want her*



***to have a proper like use the benefit of all the free stuff you can actually get cause it's going to help her'* (BR/W3/005)**

Several participants mentioned family members reading at home. For example, one participant commented that:

***'We were just always surrounded by books cause my mum, not so much my dad my dad read books for information, but my mum read books for pleasure. She even had a special shelf under the kitchen table to keep her books'* (BG/W3/010)**

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'my mother and father they always had us at the libraries reading, we were all readers and we used to go to the art galleries cause my granny lived just where the Kelvinhall is. Used to walk through there every day seeing the statutes and all that, my father on a Sunday used to take us into the art galleries and see all the different things. He made life interesting.'* (BG/W3/002)**

- **BOOK BUYING (YES)**

4 participants across 3 types of library groups who had been encouraged to use public libraries as a child mentioned the purchasing of books during childhood, with most of those participants sharing not being able to afford books. For example, one participant commented that:

***'well, if we wanted to read anything we had to as we didn't have anything at home [laughs]'* (WG/E1/001)**

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'we had very little money I'm afraid to say, so books were a luxury to get birthdays or Christmases you got books'* (KG/S1/004)**

- **HOME ENVIRONMENT (NO)**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that they had not been encouraged to use public libraries as a child mentioned the environment at home. Some of those participants mentioned their parents not reading at home. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Nobody in the family kinda read so it wasn't something you went oh I'm going to try that it's pretty good, no it wasn't one of those things'* (BR/E3/010)**

Some participants mentioned their parents encouraging other things. For example, one participant commented that:

*'I was an only child and I got lots of attention, em, and I went to the theatre and things as a child and holidays abroad all that kind of thing, so I got lots as a child but I don't remember the book thing' (BG/W3/005)*

- **BOOK BUYING (NO)**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that they had not been encouraged to use public libraries as a child mentioned the purchasing of reading books in childhood. Most of those participants mentioned not being purchased reading books. For example, one participant commented that:

*'we were never bought books or encouraged to read in any way... we were never given books as children to read. The only thing you got like was annuals at Christmas' (WG/S1/013)*

Some participants mentioned their parents buying books instead of encouraging library use. For example, one participant commented that:

*'Em my parents read a lot as well so eh I don't think library, they are very much purchasers of books so maybe not that much about library but reading sure'*  
(BR/E3/012)

### 45.3.8.3 Question 8B- Did you enjoy going to the library?

Of the responses provided by 22 participants as to whether they enjoyed using the library as a child the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
<b>Books &amp; Reading (Yes)</b>	2	4	1	0	0	1	8
<b>Despite Strictness (Yes)</b>	2	1	0	0	0	3	6
<b>Events &amp; Resources (Yes)</b>	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
<b>Quiet &amp; Space (Yes)</b>	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
<b>Atmosphere (No)</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 34: Q8B Coding Summary

- **BOOKS & READING (YES)**

8 participants across 4 types of library groups who discussed enjoying using public libraries as a child, mentioned books and reading. Most of those participants mentioned enjoying having access to books. For example, one participant commented that:

*'it was great all these books...we didn't have as many books in the house now as you've have...I liked even going in and looking through them and thinking I must take them out sometime'* (BG/W3/006)

Whilst another participant commented that:

*'Yeah I did, we used to race each other round to the library to get the latest famous five book'* (KG/S1/011)

Some participants discussed enjoying using the library because they enjoy reading. For example, one participant commented that:

*'I enjoy reading books and so I imagine I did. I must have got it from somewhere'* (BR/E3/004)

- **DESPITE STRICTNESS (YES)**

6 participants across 3 types of library groups discussed enjoying using public libraries as a child despite the strict atmosphere. For example, one participant commented that:

*'Absolutely without a doubt, one of my favourite places was the library when I was growing up. Fantastic environment, welcoming, friendly, warm even though it was a different mindset then. It was the quiet silence in the library type thing, it was still a lovely environment'* (KG/E2/007)

Whilst another participant who commented laughingly that:

*'Yes except for the librarian who was a fiend, even if you blew your nose you practically had to leave you know'* (BG/W3/001)

- **EVENTS & RESOURCES (YES)**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups, both of which under 40, discussed enjoying using public libraries as a child because of available resources or events. For example, one participant commented that:

*'Yeah I enjoyed it, just things like computers for example when you are doing your homework'* (BR/E3/005)

- **QUIET & SPACE (YES)**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups discussed enjoying using public libraries as a child because of the quiet or space available. For example, one participant commented that:

*‘as a child I loved the quiet of the library and the space. I was brought up in a room and a kitchen... so to be taken to a library where it was quiet and I could sit and read a book I loved, I just loved that’ (KG/S1/004)*

- **ATMOSPHERE (NO)**

1 participant discussed not enjoying using public libraries as a child because of the atmosphere commenting that:

*‘Probably no, because you felt as if you would get into trouble for speaking and things like that...it wasn’t the sort of social thing it is now’ (KG/E2/005)*

#### 4.3.8.4 Question 8C- Do you feel differently about libraries now as an adult than you did as a child?

Of the 21 participants who stated they did (14) or did not (7) feel differently about public libraries now as an adult than as a child the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Function (Yes)	3	3	1	0	1	2	10
Atmosphere (Yes)	3	3	0	0	0	4	10
No Difference (No)	0	2	2	0	2	1	7

Figure 35: Q8C Coding Summary

- **FUNCTION (YES)**

10 participants across 5 types of library groups, who discussed feeling differently about public libraries as an adult, mentioned changes in the function of libraries away from solely being the provider of books. Most of those participants mentioned there now being more going on in libraries. For example, one participant commented that:

*‘I think probably just recognising that they do have a different function... I mean years ago it was for the books only...I can see as an adult that they are... providing much more community services’ (KG/E2/007)*

One participant mentioned the availability of library groups as making public libraries more ‘comfortable’ commenting that:

*‘I think they made it more...comfortable to people. Because I mean like you can come in and you can sit round the table and do wee odds and ends like in wee groups, whereas then you didn’t get wee groups and things like that...It was all just books, you came in and got a book and you went away’ (BG/S3/005)*

Some participants mentioned the changes in facilities available in libraries. With one participant stating these as having an impact on both their perception and usage of public libraries:

***'I would have probably said I'll never go in a library, because...I associated it with old people...But no it's totally different now, completely especially when they've got the computer and the internet and things and like this one a cafe' (BR/E3/010)***

- **ATMOSPHERE (YES)**

10 participants across 3 types of library groups, most social groups, who discussed feeling differently about public libraries as an adult, mentioned changes in the atmosphere and the impact of these. Most of those participants mentioned libraries no longer being silent and stern. For example, one participant commented that:

***'You're no getting hushed anymore, you don't have to sort of tip toe about. Em it's just a total different atmosphere now' (KG/E2/001)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'I think then you felt you were imposing on a space that really was to be silent and not shared' (WG/S1/019)***

Participants felt that a move to a more relaxed atmosphere was an improvement with one participant, a lifelong regular library user, commenting that:

***'they are far more relaxed now...So I suppose yes it's different now from as a child, but different in a good way because I think they are encouraging people now' (KG/S1/004)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'I think they are better now for communities. There's none of this everybody seated, keep quiet, people treating you like you've not to breathe' (WG/E1/002)***

One participant who mentioned a change in the atmosphere did not feel that this was a good thing commenting that:

***'Em yes I do, it won't be very popular, but em I loved the quietness of the libraries years ago...to me that was how the library should be. I realise that economically it has to cover a much wider ground now but I do miss that...like hallowed halls feeling that you used to get of going into the library' (BG/W3/004)***

- **NO DIFFERENCE**

7 participants across 3 types of library groups, who stated that they did not feel differently about public libraries as an adult, mentioned still having strong positive feelings towards libraries. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘No I’ve always liked coming to the library, I was always used to it so I’ve always done it’ (KG/S1/010)***

Whilst another participant, with childhood experience of European public libraries commented that:

***‘Em, compared to the library I went to as a child not very much, cause that library to this day also holds lots of events and they actually do exhibitions there and have art on the walls so similar’ (BR/E3/012)***

#### 4.3.9 Question 9 and 9A Participant Responses

42 research participants were asked how important they felt their local public library was to them personally (Q9) and within their local community (Q9A).

- 17 participants felt public libraries were important to both them personally and within the local community.
- 8 participants felt public libraries were important to them personally but questioned their importance within the local community.
- 3 participants felt public libraries were important to them personally but did not provide an answer as to their importance within the local community.
- 6 participants did not provide an answer as to the personal importance of public libraries but did state they were important within the local community.
- 4 participants stated that whilst public libraries were not important to them personally, they were important within the local community.
- 1 participant stated that they felt public libraries were neither important to them personally or within their local community.
- 3 participants provided no answer to either question.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
Q9	4	7	5	5	5	7	33
Q9A	7	7	6	5	4	7	36

Figure 36: Q9/9A Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.9.1 Question 9- Is your local library important to you?

Of the 28 participants who stated that public libraries were personally important to them and the 5 participants who stated that they were not, the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Because of the group (Yes)	1	2	1	1	1	4	10
Access to resources/information (Yes)	0	3	2	2	2	1	10
Having a place to go locally (Yes)	1	0	2	0	1	2	6
As a parent (Yes)	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Lack of need (No)	2	1	0	1	1	0	5

Figure 37: Q9 Coding Summary

- **BECAUSE OF THE GROUP (YES)**

10 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that public libraries were important to them, mentioned their membership in a library group within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘Yeah very important, because there is a book group especially’ (BG/W3/003)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘I suppose they are, with you know doing the volunteering and going to the knitting group and things like that...I’d be a bit lost without going to the library’ (KG/E2/001)***

For many participants, public libraries were important to them solely because of group membership. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘Well it is now obviously yes, because I like coming to the book club’ (BG/W3/005)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘Well in general no, but this group certainly yeah’ (LN/S2/001)***

- **ACCESS TO RESOURCES/INFORMATION (YES)**

10 participants across 5 types of library groups who stated that public libraries were important to them, mentioned the importance of having access to resources within their answer. Most of those participants specifically mentioned the importance of having access to books. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘Yes as can’t afford to buy a lot of the books I would like to read’ (CW/E2/007)***

Some participants mentioned the importance of having somewhere to find out information within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘Three days I am searching where is the citizens advice so one young lady she said to me you have to enter into the library and ask there... They gave me an appointment and I started to meet citizens advice then I start to have more information you know’ (BR/W2/001)***

- **HAVING A PLACE TO GO LOCALLY (YES)**

6 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated that public libraries were important to them, mentioned the importance of having somewhere to go locally within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘as somebody who has recently given birth...having somewhere local that you could go where there’s other people in the same situation that was really important’ (CW/W3/002)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘it’s like a wee safety net type thing knowing you can go there. I’ve seen me coming in on a rotten day...sitting down and reading something for a wee while before I go up the road. It’s nice just having it there’ (BG/S3/005)***

- **AS A PARENT (YES)**

4 participants across 1 type of library group who stated that public libraries were important to them, mentioned the importance of the library in helping them as a parent within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘I really want to encourage her to read...with the Bounce and Rhyme they do this book thing where they put them in a canvas bag...it made me realise that I have to take all sorts of different books because you can’t predict what she’s going to enjoy’ (BR/E3/012)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘going to a play area is not the same, it’s not interacting with your kid it’s letting your kid go play whereas this is totally different, and I like this’ (BR/E3/010)***

- **LACK OF NEED (NO)**



Of the 5 participants across 4 types of library groups who stated public libraries were not personally important to them the main theme identified was a lack of personal need for library resources. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘We don’t need it because we get that service ourselves, but we can afford to do that. Not everybody can’ (WG/S1/017)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***‘No, they aren’t important you can just go on the internet in the house...I just google it’ (LN/W1/004)***

#### 4.3.9.2 Question 9A- Do you think your local library is important within your community?

Of the 27 participants who stated public libraries were important within their community, 8 participants who were unsure and 1 participant who stated that they were not important within their community, the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Access to services & facilities (Yes)	4	5	2	3	1	3	19
For specific demographics within community (Yes)	5	4	3	1	1	4	18
Lack of use (Unsure)	0	2	1	0	0	2	5
Not for everyone (Unsure)	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Not in my community (No)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Figure 38: Q9A Coding Summary

- **ACCESS TO SERVICES & FACILITIES (YES)**

19 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that public libraries were important within their local community, mentioned the importance of the community having access to library services and facilities within their answer. Many of those participants specifically mentioned the importance of pc and internet access. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘not everyone has a computer at home you know’ (WG/E1/001)***

Some participants mentioned the importance of the library as a hub in the community within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'When I walk into that library, I do feel that it's a wee centre cause there's not much there but it provides a wee hub' (WG/S1/019)***

Whilst some participants mentioned the importance of the library in providing social and technological support in the community within their answer. For example, one participant commented that

***'I think for a lot of people it's very good...especially with the social help and if you want to learn how to use a computer' (KG/S1/005)***

- **FOR SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHICS (YES)**

18 participants across 6 types of library groups who stated that public libraries were important within their local community, mentioned the importance of the library to specific demographics in the community such as children and families, all nationalities, the unemployed, students and the elderly within their answer. Many of those participants specifically mentioned the importance of public libraries for children and families. For example, one participant commented that:

***'they are needed I think in the community to bring kids in to let them see there's more to life than sitting there on a game and talking' (WG/E1/002)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'it's a good thing for kids you know like to bring your kids up to enjoy books' (WG/E1/001)***

Other participants highlighted the importance of public libraries within communities for all nationalities:

***'I think this one's quite good for multiculturalism you get loads of different religions and cultures, it's no just white anymore' (BR/E3/004)***

Whilst another participant commented that:

***'There's a lot of asylum seekers and a real mix of people and I think it's a centre where they can go and use it as a real facility' (WG/S1/018)***

- **LACK OF USE (UNSURE)**

5 participants across 3 types of library groups questioned how important public libraries were within their local community, mentioning a lack of use within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I'd like to think so...I don't think it's used as much as it should be, but I know for a fact that if it wasn't here it would be missed'* (BG/S3/005)**

Whilst another participant highlighted the lack of use despite efforts by public libraries:

***'I don't know. I don't see people...walking along with bags of books...I don't sort of see anybody sort of gathering children up and saying we must go to the library...the librarians are knocking their socks off to make it as nice as possible'***  
(BG/W3/001)

Whilst one participant felt public libraries could do more:

***'I presume it is....it probably could be made more em have a more important role or a more active role within the community'*** (KG/E2/007)

- **NOT FOR EVERYONE (UNSURE)**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups questioned how important public libraries were within their local community, mentioning that they were important ***'only to some people'*** (CW/E2/004) within their answer. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Aye for the people that goes to libraries, but for some people no'*** (LN/W1/003)

- **NOT IN MY COMMUNITY (NO)**

1 participant from 1 type of library group did not think public libraries were important within their local community, because residents were not sensible enough to use them, commenting that:

***'They are probably barred for nicking books...they are all nutjobs up here...I don't think they'd be coming to the library cause they are a bit weird to come to a library. I think you need to be a bit sensible'*** (LN/W1/001)

#### 4.3.10 Question 10 Participant Responses

41 research participants were asked how their public library could improve its role within their local community. 2 Participants provided no answer.

	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Responses
Q10	7	7	6	7	5	7	39

Figure 39: Q10 Interview Responses Summary

#### 4.3.10.1 Question 10- Is there one thing you think the library could do to improve its role within your local community?

Of the 39 responses provided, 25 participants offered suggestions for improvements, 11 participants felt public libraries did not need to improve and 3 stated they didn't know. Of the improvement suggestions provided the main themes identified were:

CODE	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	Total
Raise awareness	2	3	1	0	1	2	9
Targeted services	1	1	2	1	1	1	7
Usability of space	2	0	0	1	1	1	5
Group support	0	0	0	0	2	2	4

Figure 40: Q10 Coding Summary

- **RAISE AWARENESS**

9 participants across 5 types of library groups highlighted the need to raise awareness within communities of what public libraries offer. A majority of respondents felt that public libraries need to advertise more. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Em advertise it more, it's very hard to find out what's going on in your community'***  
(BR/E3/010)

Whilst another participant highlighted a need for advertising methods which meet the specific needs of groups such as the elderly:

***'there's a lot of people that don't know about what they do and I do think now and again putting pamphlets in their door would help...To me it was just a library, until I started going to the knitting group and the walking group...I think a lot of older people like myself are not always looking into the web'*** (KG/S1/005)

Another participant felt increased advertising would have a positive impact on library usage:

***'if they maybe advertised a wee bit more in some way, these are the facilities we've got then maybe people would think oh that sounds really good we will go more often'*** (WG/S1/018)

In addition, participants highlighted a need for outreach within communities by library staff for the benefit of both children and the elderly. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I don't think it would do them any harm to make their presence known more in communities... If they were to go out to groups, go out to maybe community centres or schools even things like that...it would raise awareness'* (KG/E2/007)**

And another participant:

***'if they could do outreach in different maybe nurseries...and maybe at the other end of the scale, do librarians ever go into homes for the elderly?'* (KG/S1/004)**

- **TARGETED SERVICES**

7 participants across 6 types of library groups suggested that public libraries should offer more targeted services for specific ages. A majority of those participants felt that public libraries ***'should concentrate on the kids'*** (LN/S2/008), by offering more activities for children. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Em I'd say maybe just have more things for kids to do I'd say. Obviously bounce and rhyme is amazing, but I think it would be good if they introduced something else... it would be good to have things like baby sensory'* (BR/E3/005)**

In addition, participants felt that ***'libraries should be providing more for different age groups'*** (BG/W3/006). For example, one participant commented:

***'Oh things for the young elderly (laughs) the young elderly I like that. There's so much things for children and it's great but em that would be nice'* (WG/S1/019)**

- **USABILITY OF SPACE**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups raised issues regarding the usability of library spaces and improvements which could be made. Many of those participants felt that the library space would benefit from zoned areas. For example, one participant commented:

***'They should have a bit in the library where you can have a conversation somewhere and then have a bit for being quiet and all that'* (LN/W1/004)**

And another:

***'Maybe just somewhere to sit for hot drinks or something...it could be in a cordoned off area'* (WG/S1/017)**

In addition, some participants felt there were barriers both physical and perceived which made libraries inaccessible. For example, one participant commented:

*'My friend's not always able to get out, how on earth would you get a wheelchair round?'* (CW/E2/007)

- **GROUP SUPPORT**

4 participants across 2 types of library groups suggested the need for additional support/resources for library groups. For example, one participant commented that:

*'it would be lovely if we had more popular books available to the book club as they are published'* (BG/W3/004)

In addition, the need for additional library groups was highlighted due to waiting lists for certain groups and inconvenient scheduling:

*'I was going to join the writing group cause I like writing as well...but then I realised it was a Tuesday night and I can't do a Tuesday night, that was it I couldn't join that'* (BG/W3/003)

## 4.4 Cultural Participation Survey

Wider cultural participation beyond public library use was quantitatively and qualitatively explored with 41 of the 42 participants during interview via an accompanying survey component. Participants provided a numerical response, between 4 (very often) to 0 (not at all), regarding the frequency with which they visited cultural places (e.g., museums), attended cultural events (e.g., concerts), participated alone (e.g., reading for pleasure) and with others (e.g., choir) in cultural activities. Further during completion of the survey, participants provided additional contextual data regarding the factors which positively or negatively influenced participation. Quantitative data is presented by category (social, developmental, cultural), qualitative responses are presented by group activity. As with previous and subsequent chapters *illustrative anonymised participant quotes are presented in bold italic for emphasis.*

### 4.4.1 Visited

#### 4.4.1.1 Frequency of participation

41 participants were surveyed regarding their frequency of attendance at formal cultural events either alone or with others. Participants were asked to allocate a number between 4

(very often) to 0 (not at all) for each activity. Most participants provided a response for all activities.

- Parks were the type of place most participants attended very frequently, with 16 participants reporting that this was something that they did *very often* (4).
- Cinemas were the type of place most participants attended reasonably frequently, with 12 participants reporting that this was something that they did *fairly often* (3)
- Museums were the type of place most participants attended reasonably frequently, with 24 participants stating that this was something that they did *not very often* (2).
- Art Galleries were the type of place most participants attended infrequently, with 8 participants reporting that this was something that they had done *once* (1) in the past year.
- Archives were the type of place most participants never visited, with 8 participants reporting that this was something that they had *not done at all* (0) in the past year.

		Visited Cinema	Visited Museum	Visited Art Gallery	Visited Archives	Visited Historical Building	Visited Parks
Social	Responses	14	14	14	13	14	13
	Total	33	34	30	5	34	42
	Median	2.4	2.4	2.1	0.4	2.4	3.2
Developmental	Responses	14	14	14	14	12	14
	Total	21	23	21	8	14	31
	Median	1.5	1.6	1.5	0.6	1.2	2.2
Cultural	Responses	13	13	13	13	13	12
	Total	26	27	28	13	24	28
	Median	2.0	2.1	2.2	1.0	1.8	2.3

Figure 41: Cultural Places Visited Responses

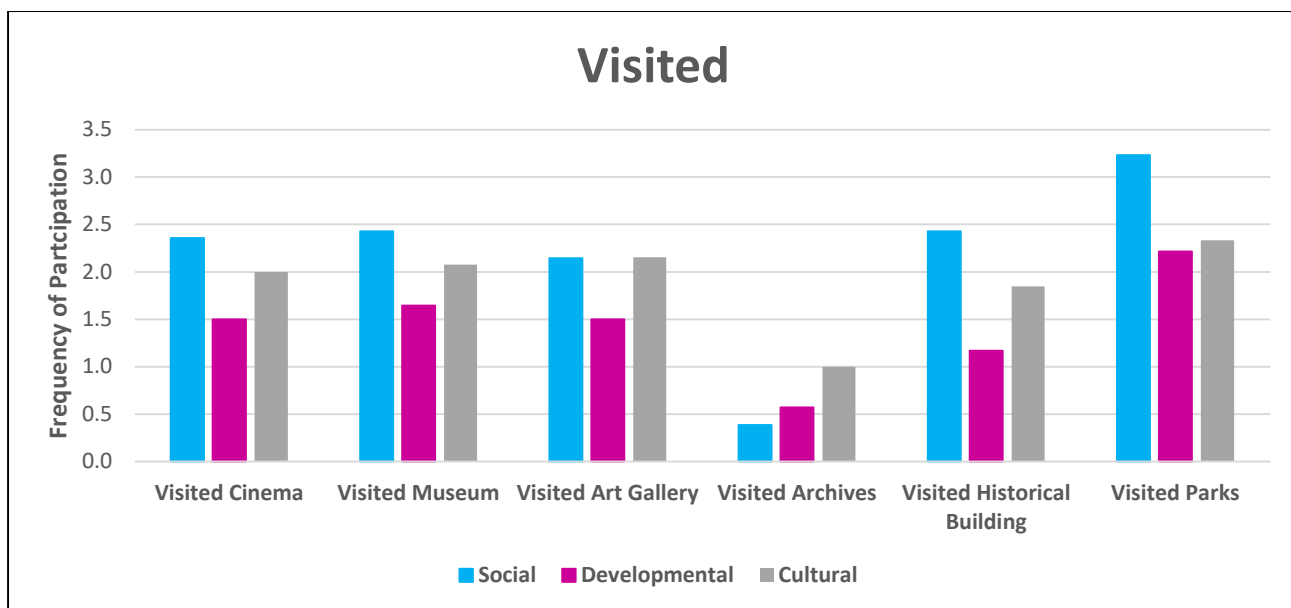


Figure 42: Cultural Places Visited Frequency

#### 4.4.1.2 Reasons for participation/ non-participation

Some participants discussed their reasons for visiting cultural places such as the cinema, museums, art galleries, archives, heritage buildings and parks. The main themes identified were:

CODE	Social		Developmental		Cultural		Total
	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	
Interest	3	3	3	2	0	4	15
Family	2	2	5	1	0	3	13
Practical	1	0	2	0	1	4	8
On Holiday	1	2	1	0	0	1	5
Social	2	1	0	0	0	2	5
Health & Wellbeing	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Alone	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Awareness	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 43: Cultural Places Visited Coding Summary

- **INTEREST**

15 participants across 5 types of library groups mentioned interest as a reason why they do or do not visit cultural places. Most participants mentioned an interest in history as providing a motivation for visiting cultural places. For example, one participant commented that:



***'there was a prison we went to... it was so interesting and it was the old building the people were dressed up, like the guards as you were going into the cells and things.... it kind of gave you an insight into how things were. I like things like that, I like old history, like your older generation I love their stories. I always have, they have a different outlook of life to what it is now its just so interesting'* (BR/E3/010)**

And another participant discussing using archives commented that:

***'Ah quite interested in that, the last one I used believe it or no was the Titanic Museum in Belfast. And I found someone that was on it, that came from the same name as my mother's family name and came from the same area and she survived ...I don't know if there was any connection you know... but it's very interesting and you could look up every single passenger's name.'* (WG/S1/013)**

- **FAMILY**

13 participants across 5 types of library groups mentioned family as a reason why they do or do not visit cultural places. Most participants mentioned family, particularly children, as providing a motivation for visiting cultural places. For example, one new mother discussed visiting cultural places with her child commented that:

***'We've been quite often to museums actually as well... we have been to the school museum and em we are just planning to go to the Kelvingrove to look at the animals as she's just coming to an age now... we have been to a few places and she does enjoy it.... there was an event on for children...in GOMA... they have an art corner for children, she was too young for it, but I was curious to go and check it out with here anyway...it's maybe something we will do again when she is a bit bigger.'* (BR/E3/012)**

Some participants discussed visiting cultural places with their partner. For example, one retired participant who goes regularly to the cinema with her husband commented that:

***'He's no longer sighted so I have to translate a lot of the film for him, so I feel it's keeping him doing something that we have both enjoyed since we were going out together as teenagers.'* (BG/W3/004)**

Some participants discussed visiting cultural places for the benefit of family members. For example, one retired participant who visited archives to research her family history commented that:

***'I discovered, well not that I discovered but my mother had been ah adopted... so we knew nothing at all knew nothing at all about the family and em before she died she asked my brother and I to eh try and find out... she wanted to know as much as she could so we had a couple of, her birth certificate and something else I can't remember what it was and we took ourselves off to Edinburgh to wherever it was and managed to get some information for her about her mother and the family just through the research they did and that was really what prompted us to start'*** (KG/S1/004)

Some participants discussed family as making visiting cultural places such as the cinema difficult. For example, one participant a new mother who had previously regularly visited the cinema commented that:

***'I've got a cinecard but..., some cinemas they do a baby and mum showing so I've not been yet as the one at the forge they don't do it, so I need to find out if the one in town does it so I've not been yet but before I was pregnant, I used to be at the cinema every week.'*** (BR/E3/005)

- **PRACTICAL**

8 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned practical considerations such as cost, weather, and convenience as a reason they do or do not visit cultural places. Many of those participants mentioned cost as a barrier. For example, one unemployed participant commented that:

***'Can't afford to go to the cinema'*** (CW/E2/007)

Some participants highlighted the weather as influencing visits to indoor cultural places. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I like to wander around the galleries and the museums, mainly sometimes because it's so wet. It's not a great interest to me but it's mostly just if I'm on my own... just to get out of the rain.'*** (WG/E1/002)

A couple of participants highlighted convenience as influencing visits to cultural places. For example, one participant, a mother, commented that:

***'We go quite frequently to the one down the green what's it called The Peoples Palace cause it's where the park is, we go to the park so we tend to go there quite frequently' (BR/E3/004)***

- **ON HOLIDAY**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned being on holiday as motivating visits to cultural places. For example, one participant discussing visits to heritage buildings and their grounds commented that:

***'it just depends where I am. You know if I was away for the day somewhere and you know I saw something like that I would want to go in and have a look... like next week I'm going away so I will see different places you know but I don't set out deliberately to go to something you know' (WG/S1/013)***

- **SOCIAL**

5 participants across 3 types of library groups mentioned visiting cultural places for social reasons. Some participant discussed taking other people. For example, one participant commented that:

***'if I have visitors and that I probably make a point of going to... Glasgow Green, art gallery, museums things like that just to sort of show that off to people' (KG/E2/007)***

A couple of participants highlighted visiting places as providing a topic of conversation with others. For example, one participant jokingly discussing art galleries, commented that:

***'the one in Queen Street I like to go in there, lot of rubbish right enough, but I like to go in... so I can moan about the rubbish' (BG/S3/005)***

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned their health and wellbeing in relation to visiting cultural places. For example, one participant a new mother, commented that:

***'I really like going to the botanic gardens or the parks... It's like a gulp of fresh air (laughs) and it's a form of escapism as well I mean the thought of being in cities is***

*really exciting there's lots of things to do and there's art... However sometimes it's just lovely to go for a walk' (CW/W3/002)*

- **ALONE**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned difficulties visiting cultural places alone. For example, one participant a retired widow, commented that:

*'it's not nice sitting in the cinema on your own... I like going around them [historical buildings] but again since I've been on my own, I don't really do that. I took my husband everywhere he was Italian... took him all over to see all places like that. But I haven't done that since. Well, I think its nicer [to go with others] ... cause you can talk about things and just have a wander' (KG/S1/005)*

- **AWARENESS**

1 participant from 1 type of library groups mentioned awareness as being a barrier to visiting cultural places commenting that:

*'maybe I just don't read the proper things like The List and stuff but it's difficult now to, I know Glasgow's got a What's On Magazine em I don't know if East Ren do that. I find it difficult to kind of access what's happening. I keep missing things, it's annoying... So I don't get these thrills and these big things in Glasgow.'*  
(KG/S1/011)

#### 4.4.2      Attended

##### 4.4.2.1      Frequency of participation

41 participants were surveyed regarding their frequency of attendance at formal cultural events either alone or with others. Participants were asked to allocate a number between 4 (very often) to 0 (not at all) for each activity. Most participants provided a response for all activities.

- The theatre was the type of event most participants attended very frequently, with 5 participants reporting that this was something that they did *very often* (4).
- The theatre was the type of event most participants attended reasonably frequently, with 9 participants reporting that this was something that they did *fairly often* (3)
- The theatre and a concert were the type of event most participants attended infrequently, with 12 participants reporting that these were something that they did *not very often* (2).

- Festivals and Exhibitions were the type of event most participants attended least frequently, with 7 participants reporting that this was something that they had done *once (1)* in the past year.
- The opera was the type of event most participants never attended, with 33 participants reporting that this was something that they had *not done at all (0)* in the past year.

		Attended Concert	Attended Theatre	Attended Dance	Attended Opera	Attended Festival/Exhibition
Social	Responses	14	14	13	14	14
	Total	27	34	15	6	25
	Median	1.9	2.4	1.2	0.4	1.8
Developmental	Responses	14	14	14	14	14
	Total	17	13	15	2	8
	Median	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.1	0.6
Cultural	Responses	13	13	13	13	13
	Total	14	26	10	5	15
	Median	1.1	2.0	0.8	0.4	1.2

Figure 44: Cultural Events Attended Responses

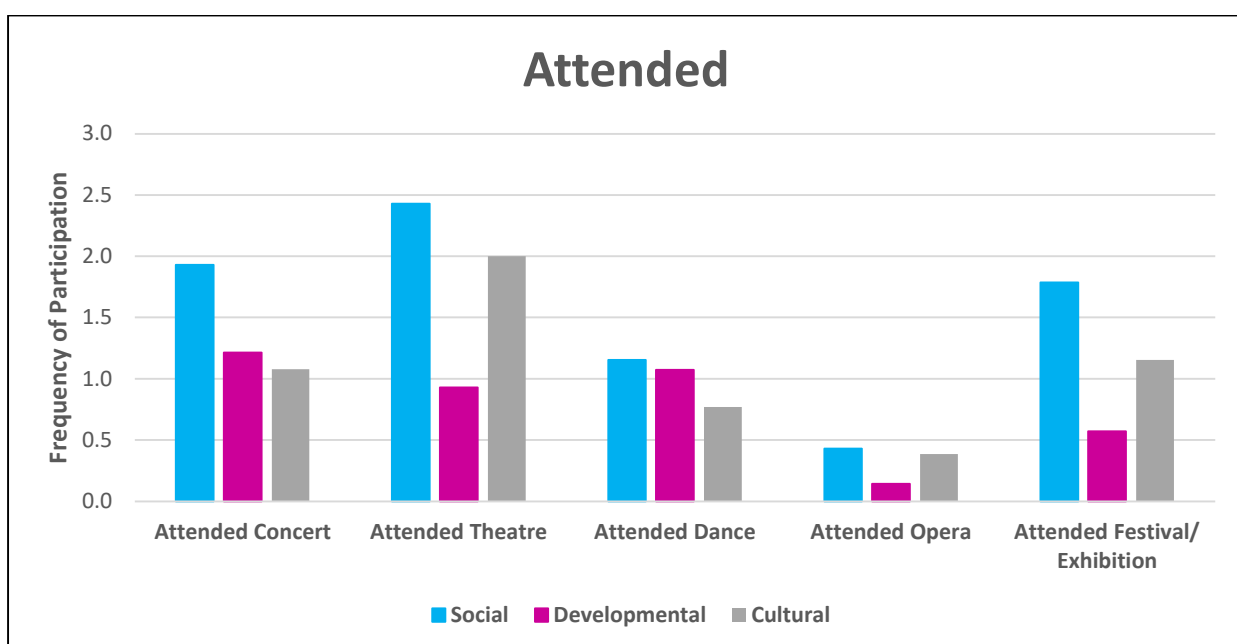


Figure 45: Cultural Events Attended Frequency

#### 4.4.2.2 Reasons for participation/ non-participation

Some participants discussed the reasons for their attendance/non-attendance at cultural events such as concerts, theatre, festivals and exhibitions, dance and opera. The main themes identified were:

CODE	Social		Developmental		Cultural		Total
	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	
Interest	2	2	1	2	1	4	12
Opportunity	1	5	2	0	0	4	12
Family	2	2	3	0	0	2	10
Practical	1	2	1	0	0	3	7
Social	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
Health & Wellbeing	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

Figure 46: Cultural Events Attended Coding Summary

- **INTEREST**

12 participants across 6 types of library groups mentioned interest as a reason why they do or do not attend formal cultural events. Most participants mentioned interest as providing a motivation for attending cultural events. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘I’ve got an eclectic taste in music, so I go to see a lot of things’ (CW/E2/003)***

Whilst other participants discussed a lack of interest as a reason for non-attendance. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘The only theatre I’d go to is if I was going under the knife’ (LN/W1/003)***

Some participants discussed certain events as ***‘not their scene’ (LN/W1/003)***. For example, one participant having attended the opera commented that:

***‘I don’t hate it but, they say you either love it or hate it, but... it does feel a wee bit high-brow I’m afraid... you don’t really understand it either’ (KG/S1/010)***

- **OPPORTUNITY**

12 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned the importance of opportunity as a reason why they do or do not attend formal cultural events. Many of those participants mentioned which cultural events are available as being a determining factor. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Opera I haven't done lately because I haven't fancied anything that's been on'  
(BG/W3/001)***

Whilst other participants discussed being gifted/or gifting tickets to events as providing an opportunity to attend events. For example, one participant commented that:

***'We quite often get theatre tickets for our Christmas as well cause we are not materialistic you know and it sounds terrible but our children know we can buy our own pyjamas... so they are more likely to give us a voucher or tickets to the theatre or something like that' (BG/W3/010)***

A couple of participants felt there was a lack of opportunity to attend cultural events in Glasgow as opposed to in other places. For example, one participant commented that:

***'Theatre 2, just because... there is just a lack in Glasgow isn't there? Yeah, there's not very much... if you want to see anything in the way of classical you have to go to London' (KG/S1/011)***

- **FAMILY**

10 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned family members as a reason they do or do not attend formal cultural events. Many of those participants mentioned attending a cultural event with a family member. For example, one participant who regularly attends concerts with her husband commented:

***'Both myself and my husband we love music, we play it all the time, we watch music on the television. We go to the concerts... we are actually going out on Friday... it's a soul ceilidh, we didn't know what that was but I looked it up earlier and its soul music and David Bowie music and Stones music... We are so excited...It sounds good. Something different' (WG/E1/007)***

Some participants mentioned taking children to cultural events as providing a motivation for attendance. For example, one participant, a new first-time mother, commented that:

***'I've not been but I'm thinking next year at the Irn-Bru one will be my first one, cause obviously my friends have always invited me but because I didn't have a baby, I didn't see the point of going so I think now I've got a reason to go'  
(BR/E3/004)***

Whilst another participant mentioned child development as providing a motivation for attendance at dance performances commenting that:

***'obviously you take the children so they can absorb everything' (KG/S1/010)***

One participant mentioned the difficulties in attending cultural events after becoming a mother commenting that:

***'Love the theatre...my friends had invited me a few times but I haven't been able to go just because she's [baby] not a very good sleeper in the evening so I can't go to evening things... It's not something I could easily get up and walk away from a play.'* (BR/E3/012)**

- **PRACTICAL**

7 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned practical considerations such as cost and location as a reason they do or do not attend formal cultural events. Many of those participants mentioned cost as a barrier. For example, one participant highlighted cost in relation to attendance at different types of cultural events commented:

***'I don't go very often to the actual theatre because of the expense...If it didn't cost as much to go to the Edinburgh festival I would go' (BG/W3/004)***

Some participants discussed the location of cultural venues as both enabling and limiting opportunities for attendance at events. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I've never been to the opera, em I don't fancy it at all do you?... I don't think I would choose to go you know if something happened, or maybe if there was a performance or something like that locally you would say oh, I'd go along' (KG/E2/007)***

- **SOCIAL**

3 participants across 3 types of library groups highlighted the social aspects of attending formal cultural events as a motivating factor. For example, one participant commented:

***'I love concerts... I can manage to get to concerts and so it's good because... it lets me meet up with friends that I haven't seen for years' (KG/E2/007)***

Whilst one participant mentioned finding attending certain kinds of events as being more difficult than others on their own commenting that:



***'I was a great fan of concerts but not now. You don't do these things when you're on your own...it's easier going to the cinema on your own than going to a concert'***  
(KG/S1/005)

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

2 participants across 1 type of library group mentioned their health and wellbeing as a reason why they do or do not attend formal cultural events. For example, one participant commented:

***'I like ballet I do think it's therapeutic'*** (KG/E2/007)

Whilst one participant discussed their age as having a negative impact on their attendance at concerts commenting that:

***'not as much now as you are getting older and you can't stand the same. It's something I used to do often but now it's quite rarely'*** (KG/S1/010)

#### 4.4.3 Privately participated

##### 4.4.3.1 Frequency of participation

41 participants were surveyed regarding their frequency of participation in cultural activities alone. Participants were asked to allocate a number between 4 (very often) to 0 (not at all) for each activity. Most participants provided a response for all activities.

- Pleasure Reading was the type of activity most participants privately participated in very frequently, with 24 participants reporting that this was something that they did *very often* (4).
- Pleasure Reading was the type of activity most participants privately participated in reasonably frequently, with 8 participants reporting that this was something that they did *fairly often* (3)
- Photography/Video Making was the type of activity most participants privately participated in infrequently, with 9 participants reporting that this were something that they did *not very often* (2).
- Creative Writing was the type of activity most participants privately participated in least frequently, with 5 participants reporting that this was something that they had done *once* (1) in the past year.

- Playing a musical instrument was the type of activity most participants never privately participated in, with 28 participants reporting that this was something that they had *not done at all (0)* in the past year.

		Pleasure Reading	Arts/Crafts	Creative Writing	Photography/ Video	Musical Instrument
Social	Responses	14	14	14	14	14
	Total	45	22	3	11	9
	Median	3.2	1.6	0.2	0.8	0.6
Developmental	Responses	14	14	13	14	14
	Total	44	19	19	27	9
	Median	3.1	1.4	1.5	1.9	0.6
Cultural	Responses	13	11	13	13	11
	Total	44	23	26	16	11
	Median	3.4	2.1	2.0	1.2	1.0

Figure 47: Cultural Activities Privately Participated Responses

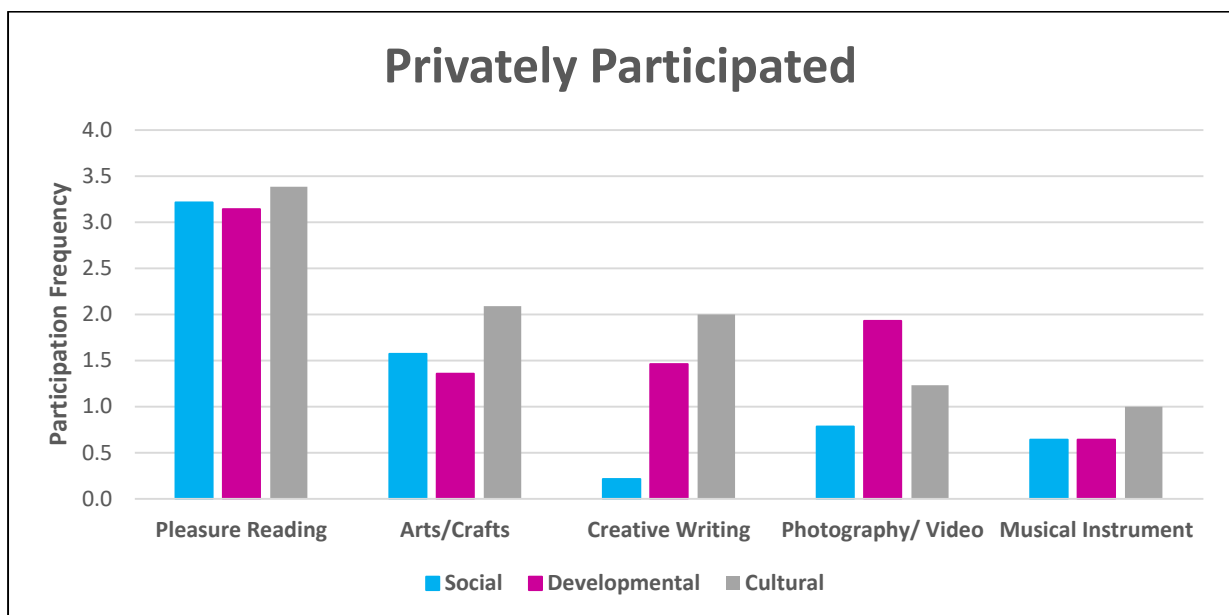


Figure 48: Cultural Activities Privately Participated Frequency

#### 4.4.3.2 Reasons for participation/ non-participation

Some participants discussed the reasons for their home-based private participation/non-participation in reading, art/craft, creative writing, photography, and musical instrument.

The main themes identified were:

CODE	Social		Developmental		Cultural		Total
	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	
Family	2	3	1	0	0	0	6
Enjoyment	2	0	1	1	0	1	5
Reminiscence	1	1	2	1	0	0	5
Ability	0	1	2	0	0	1	4
Health & Wellbeing	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
Creativity & Development	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Practical	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

Figure 49: Cultural Activities Privately Participated Coding Summary

- **FAMILY**

6 participants across 3 types of library groups highlighted the importance of family as a reason why they take part in certain home-based activities. Many of those participants mentioned children or grandchildren as providing a reason. For example, one participant a mother who does not read for pleasure but does read to her child, commented that:

***‘Just to her really, not for myself... He [child’s father] started to sing to her but he doesn’t read to her. But I’ve said to him you’ll need to start but I think he’s really nervous as well... I think he’s more embarrassed, but I think when she’s older that he’ll kinda start to do it you know what I mean. But the rest of the family read to her, like my mum and my sister and my brother we all read to her’ (BR/W2/003)***

Whilst one participant discussed their home environment as a being a barrier to crafting alone, commenting that:

***‘I’m still on the same jumper sadly... Well that’s because of the light, I wouldn’t do it during the day and in the dark nights I’d find it difficult my husband doesn’t like main lights so I’ve got to use table lamps...so in the end I don’t bother as it creates tension (laughs)’ (KG/S1/011)***

- **ENJOYMENT**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned interest as a reason they do or do not participate in certain home-based activities. For example, one participant discussing reading for pleasure, commented that:

***‘I’ve always enjoyed a good book you know, like even from when I was little so yes I just do I just like reading’ (WG/E1/001)***

Whilst one participant discussing creative writing commented that:

***'I hate writing. I just think it's a never-ending task that just doesn't need to be done'*** (BR/E3/010)

- **REMINISCENCE**

5 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned reminiscence as a reason they privately participated in certain activities. All of those participants specifically mentioned photography as the activity most motivated by reminiscence. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I like photography because it's something I can look back on. It's a memory that I can look back on'*** (WG/E1/001)

- **ABILITY**

4 participants across 3 types of library groups mentioned a lack of ability as a reason they do not privately participate in some activities. For example, one participant discussing creative writing commented that:

***'The only thing that puts me off writing is my grammar and spelling is not the best'*** (BG/W3/003)

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

3 participants across 3 types of library groups highlighted their health as a reason they do or do not participate in certain home-based activities. For example, one participant discussing creative writing, commented that:

***'I write a diary just now...I've had times in my life where I was very alone, being from somewhere else and when things had gone bad in relationships and whatever I find myself completely alone and maybe in really difficult situations and I remember these times... It's a coping mechanism, I write things down and it really helps me'*** (BR/E3/012)

Whilst one participant discussed their learning disability as a being a barrier to reading for pleasure in the home, commenting that:

***'Not a book reader, but I try and I only read a bit at a time as dyspraxia/dyslexia makes it hard to focus'*** (CW/E2/003)

- **CREATIVITY & DEVELOPMENT**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups highlighted the importance of opportunities for personal creative activities and their desire for development in these activities. For example, one participant commented:

***'I pretty much do everything. I knit, I embroider, em I like restoring old furniture...I need an outsource of some kind so I usually go through a phase where I embroider a lot and I get sick of embroidering and I do crochet and then knitting it just goes in waves...my favourite way of learning is repeating, doing it over and over again em and then I love that aspect of being doing something creative to seeing that progress'* (BR/E3/012)**

- **PRACTICAL**

2 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned practical considerations such as time and the weather as a reason they do or do not read for pleasure at home. For example, one new mother commented that:

***'I used to read quite a lot. I don't really get much time although I do read cause I always read the news and things, even though it's online'* (BR/E3/010)**

#### 4.4.4 Participated with others

##### 4.4.4.1 Frequency of participation

41 participants were surveyed regarding their frequency of participation in activities with others out with the home. Participants were asked to allocate a number between 4 (very often) to 0 (not at all) for each activity. Most participants provided a response for all activities.

- Sport was the type of activity most participants participated in with others very frequently, with 17 participants reporting this as something they did *very often* (4).
- Sport was the type of activity most participants participated in with others reasonably frequently, with 4 participants reporting that this was something that they did *fairly often* (3)
- Dance was the type of activity most participants participated in with others infrequently, with 9 participants reporting that this were something that they did *not very often* (2).

- Dance and Drama were the types of activity most participants participated in with others least frequently, with 2 participants reporting that these were something that they had done *once (1)* in the past year.
- Drama was the type of activity most participants never participated in with others, with 33 participants reporting that this was something that they had *not done at all (0)* in the past year.

		Participated Dance	Participated Music	Participated Drama	Participated Sport	Participated Other
Social	Responses	13	13	13	14	10
	Total	11	8	1	32	14
	Median	0.8	0.6	0.1	2.3	1.4
Developmental	Responses	14	14	14	14	8
	Total	19	15	7	31	8
	Median	1.4	1.1	0.5	2.2	1.0
Cultural	Responses	13	13	13	13	6
	Total	16	9	5	21	12
	Median	1.2	0.7	0.4	1.6	2.0

Figure 50: Activities Participated with Others Responses

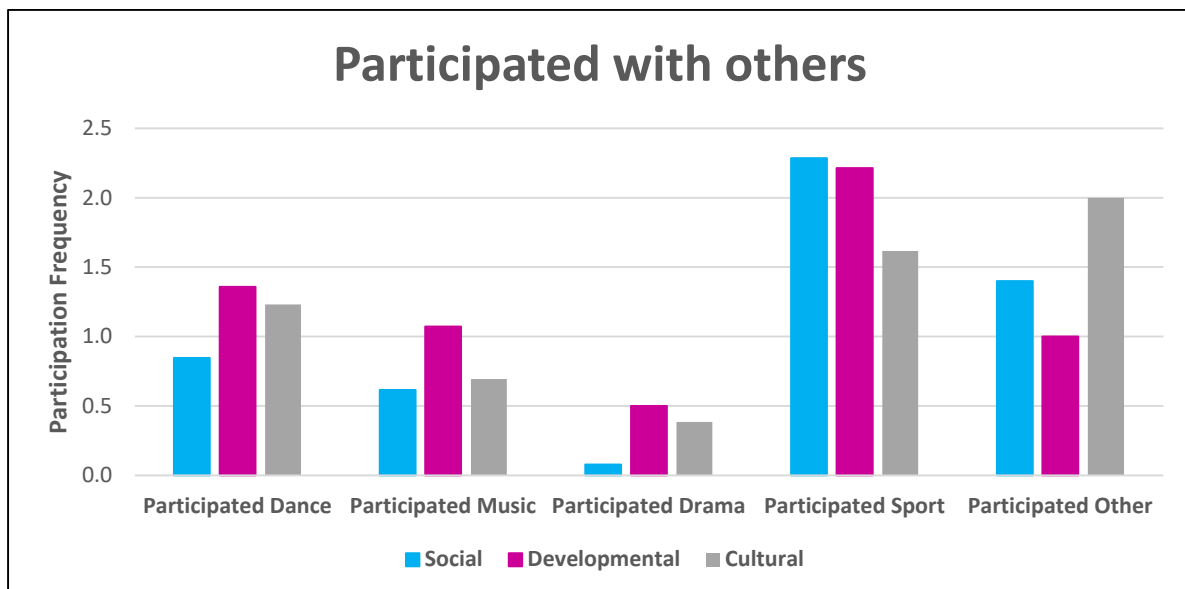


Figure 51: Activities Participated with Others Frequency

#### 4.4.4.2 *Reasons for participation/ non-participation*

Some participants discussed the reasons for their participation/non-participation with others in dance, music, drama, sport and other activities. The main themes identified were:

CODE	Social		Developmental		Cultural		Total
	WG	KG	BR	LN	CW	BG	
Health & Wellbeing	2	2	0	0	1	4	9
Social	1	2	2	0	0	2	7
Practical	0	2	1	0	0	2	5
Enjoyment	0	2	0	1	0	0	4
Helping Others	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Interest	2	0	0	0	1	0	3

Figure 52: Activities Participated with Others Coding Summary

- **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

9 participants across 4 types of library groups mentioned their health and wellbeing as providing either a reason for or a barrier to participating in activities with others. Many of those participants mentioned health and wellbeing as a positive motivator. For example, one recently retired participant discussing yoga commented that:

***‘I enjoy it it’s quiet, calming and it’s good for remaining supple when you get older and things’ (KG/S1/011)***

Whilst other participants discussed their health and wellbeing as a barrier to participation. For example, one retired participant discussing dancing commented:

***‘Well I like it but I don’t do it, because I get out of breath too much’ (BG/W3/010)***

Another participant, discussing age as a barrier to participation, commented:

***‘I do like to go dancing but I’m not a member of a group... no not at my time of life. I think I’m too old to join a class or anything like that’ (WG/E1/001)***

- **SOCIAL**

7 participants across 4 types of library groups highlighted socialising as something they do with others. Many of those participants mentioned socialising with friends. For example, one participant commented that:

***‘I meet up with my school friends once every couple of months and I go for dinner with the girls I used to work with every month...we have got to have our greet and meets, it’s a thing we have done for years’ (KG/E2/005)***

Whilst other participants mentioned socialisation as an important element of participating with others in activities such as dance and sport. For example, one elderly participant a regular line dancer at a local seniors' centre commented:

***'I enjoy the company...at the annex there's lots of things on there...my sister and I both go and we've met some lovely people there and we are all friends now'***  
(BG/W3/002)

- **PRACTICAL**

5 participants across 3 types of library groups mentioned practical considerations such as cost, location, and convenience as a reason they don't participate in some activities with others. For example, one new mother discussing dance commented that:

***'I do like to dance, em but not as in dancing classes... because of working and kids now I very much do it from the internet so it's YouTube when they put their dance classes I think I can do that, comfort of your own home if you don't have time or a babysitter it's easy to do'*** (BR/E3/010)

Whilst other participants discussed cost as a barrier to participating with others. For example, one retired participant discussing rock choirs commented:

***'I thought about it cause a lot of my friends are doing this em oh what's it called where you are part of a group, but it's actually quite expensive I've discovered. It's £10 every time they sing and then there's an annual charge and there's a traveling cost as well'*** (BG/W3/004)

- **ENJOYMENT**

4 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned enjoyment as a reason they do or do not participate in some activities with others. For example, one retired participant commented that:

***'I play Mexican Dominoes...its funny, it's a laugh... sometimes there can maybe be 12 around the table sometimes there's only 5 but its good we play it for about 2 or 3 hours and time flashes away'*** (BG/S3/005)

Whilst one participant discussed decreased enjoyment of a group as a reason for no longer participating with others in a specific activity commenting that:



**'It was just kind of it was quite a big group, but then it kind of dwindled down and it became a wee bit flat and we weren't learning a great deal so I just kinda stopped that'** (KG/E2/007)

- **DEVELOPMENT**

3 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned development in relation to a specific activity as a reason they participate in some activities with others. For example, one retired participant discussing membership of a language club commented that:

***'It's just em kind of current affairs/politics things like that...it's for people who can speak French... you have to have a good standard before you can go to the class...So I just go to try and make myself think and keep up to date with what's happening...I need to keep it up...it goes quite rapidly if you are not using it'***  
(KG/S1/011)

- **HELPING OTHERS**

3 participants across 3 types of library groups mentioned helping others as a reason they participate in some activities with others. For example, one young participant discussing dancing with others commented that:

***'I like to help the wee ones so I do so they are actually achieving something and not just not achieving it'*** (LN/W1/004)

- **INTEREST**

3 participants across 2 types of library groups mentioned having an interest in an activity as a reason they participate in it with others. For example, one participant commented that:

***'I think singing is my main one probably... I don't just go to the choir, I actually opt into extra kinda things as well to do with singing'*** (WG/S1/019)

## 4.5 Conclusion

### Observation Summary

Observation of 12 groups in 9 libraries revealed common features of participation, irrespective of group activity. Particularly noticeable was the sociable atmosphere of groups, with levels of connection amongst participants influenced both by duration of group participation and pre-existing relationships brought to groups (e.g., family/neighbours etc). Group conversations were not limited to the group activity, with the social sharing of

information on a range of topics common irrespective of duration of participation. Further, the giving and receiving of practical help and emotional support were common features of group participation. All groups appeared comfortable and at ease in the library, with flexible library spaces adapted to fit the needs of groups (e.g., the provision of extra seating/ tables/ separate spaces) and socialisation encouraged by staff (e.g. staff attitude, the provision of refreshments). Further also observed during group sessions was the use, both planned and spontaneous, of library resources such as books and pcs.

### Interview Summary

42 participant interview responses regarding membership of a public library group and further usage/non-usage of a public library provided empirical evidence of the library role within areas of multiple deprivations amongst specific groups (retired, unemployed, and new mothers) in Glasgow across four key areas: social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing.

### **Social**

A recurring theme that emerged from the data, was the social role of public libraries within communities:

- As a place to go locally, public libraries are providing a **'hub'** which, despite a perceived declining sense of community spirit by participants, provides a space for **'mixing'** of all ages, nationalities, and abilities. The opportunities afforded within the library for local socialisation were particularly important to families and the elderly.
- Public library groups, which represent a change in professional practice towards encouraging socialisation within the library, are providing libraries with a mechanism of combating isolation, connecting people with shared interests, and facilitating participation in activities which would be more difficult/less enjoyable to do alone. In turn library groups are helping to change perceptions of, bringing people into, and increasing the importance and relevance of libraries to users. A key finding was the importance of library groups in enabling interaction and connection within communities, with participants acknowledging this social aspect as providing both a motivation to join a library group and a benefit of membership.

### **Developmental**

Another common theme that emerged from the data, was the role of public libraries in enabling child, personal and professional development:

- Public libraries are being used within communities as a place for independent as well as structured learning, of particular importance is the access they provide to digital technologies. A number of mainly older group participants mentioned having taken part in a library computing skills class, whilst other participants of all ages mentioned currently or previously having used library pcs due to issues of convenience and affordability.
- The diverse range of public library groups available in public libraries are enabling participants to learn new skills and improve existing ones in areas of both interest and need. A key finding was the link between the social and developmental role of library groups in enabling child, personal, and professional development, with participants crediting the social atmosphere of groups as providing encouragement, motivation, support and help as conducive to development.

## Cultural

A further theme that emerged from the data, was the facilitative cultural intermediary role of public libraries (building and staff) in increasing accessibility and awareness of and access to cultural objects/events and places:

- Public libraries despite offering a wide range of services, were used most often by participants for book borrowing. Some participants mentioned staff created displays, book packs or recommendations as aiding their book borrowing. Many participants discussed the availability of leaflets and posters in the library in helping increase awareness of other cultural opportunities.
- Public library groups are providing sites for the production and appropriation of culture within the library. A key finding was that through socialisation within the library group, information is being shared between participants which is increasing awareness of cultural events, objects, and places.

## Wellbeing

A further theme that emerged from the data, was the role of the library in enriching participants' sense of wellbeing:

- Public libraires are providing a *'quiet'*, *'comfortable'* and *'friendly'* *'haven'* in communities which participants would feel 'lost' without having access to as and when they choose to use it.

- Public library groups are providing sustained opportunities for *'enjoyment'*, *'relaxation'*, *'escapism'* and *'activity'*. A key finding was the benefit to participants physical and mental wellbeing enabled by membership of a library group.

### Survey Summary

Wider cultural participation beyond public library use was quantitatively and qualitatively explored during interview via an accompanying survey component. Participants discussed factors such as interest, cost, availability, ability, family, friends, convenience, relaxation, expression, conversation, stimulation, and routine as having positively or negatively influenced both orientation and action in relation to visiting cultural places (e.g., museums), attending cultural events (e.g., concerts), participating alone (e.g., reading for pleasure) and with others (e.g., choir) in cultural activities. These findings correlate with the social, developmental, cultural, and wellbeing motivators discussed by participants as encouraging and enabling initial and continued participation in a public library group. Providing empirically informed insight of the public library role in overcoming barriers to and providing a driver for cultural participation, by offering cultural opportunities which mirror the wants and needs of communities in disadvantaged areas.

### Discussion Direction

This chapter presented the findings of the empirical component of this study which utilised participant observation and semi-structured interviews to collect data relating to participation in a public library group. Findings, presented by data collection method, provided empirical evidence via observation of the reality of group participation for six different group activities and via collective responses to individual interview questions of participant experience and perception of group activity, public libraries, and wider cultural participation. Given the broad focus of the study, in presenting project findings by method as opposed to themes identified via data analysis, the researcher sought to display the scope of the data collected to provide both depth and breadth of insight and a foundation for discussion of shared themes. To best convey 'the story of the data within and across themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93), the next chapter presents a discussion of four themes- social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing in combination within each group activity and individually in depth, followed by their collective implications for theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93).

# Chapter 5

# Discussion

- 5.1 [Introduction](#)
- 5.2 [Library groups](#)
- 5.2 [Shared themes identified across groups](#)
- 5.3 [Contribution to theory](#)
- 5.4 [Conclusion](#)

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

To holistically discuss the findings of this study, this chapter is arranged hierarchically starting with groups (5.2), moving on to shared themes identified across the groups (5.3) and finally collective contribution to theory (5.4), as opposed to by research questions which instead will be specifically addressed in the conclusion (6.1). This chapter begins by discussing empirical data individually in relation to a specific group, providing depth of insight in the library context of six different types of group activity: knitting, walking, adult literacy and numeracy, bounce and rhyme, creative writing, and book groups. Next building on this, this chapter collectively explores shared experiences/motivations/meanings across the six groups to empirically evidence the social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing role of public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations. Finally, these identified roles are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of this study, to empirically evidence the library role in generating cultural and social capital and function as both third place and information ground. Throughout the discussion chapter **representative words and phrases, expressed by multiple participants, are presented in bold italic for emphasis**. As included quotes are utilised to exemplify participants' shared sentiments and perspectives as opposed to those of an individual participant, unique anonymised participant identifiers have been omitted.

### 5.2 Public Library Groups

#### 5.2.1 Knitting Groups

Participants in this study discussed the varied reasons for both why they knit in addition to why they chose to knit with others. For some participants knitting offered **'therapeutic'** benefits at difficult points in their lives, whilst for others making **'a product'** provided either a **'creative'** outlet or an opportunity to be **'helpful to other people'**. In addition, for some participants knitting was either an existing skill they were looking to develop or simply a **'hobby'** which **'passes the time'**. The practice of knitting held multiple meanings for participants, which contributed to their decision to join a public library group to make knitting a shared as opposed to solitary practice. Participants discussed joining a group to knit with others for social, developmental and wellbeing reasons. The findings of this study

support those of McKenzie, Prigoda, Clement & McKechnie (2007, p.130) who in a qualitative study of public library knitting groups, found that group membership was motivated by a desire for 'help' with projects, with groups also providing 'fellowship' and 'support'. In addition to those of Price (2015, p.85) who in reflecting on her PhD research exploring knitting groups in London, highlights that groups are popular as they facilitate 'the making of a material object, enjoyment of 'process' with the time, and stimulation for thought and conversation or encouragement and advice in collective settings'.

The social nature of knitting groups was evident in both observation of and discussion with participants in this study, with attendance at the group regarded as **'more of a social occasion'**. For some participants, a desire for local socialisation with **'similar people'** with either shared interests or experiences motivated membership and continued regular attendance. Conversation was a key element of knitting groups observed in this study, with topics extending beyond knitting to cover participants everyday lives, interests, families, concerns, and health. Further within groups relationships amongst participants varied from **'company'** to **'camaraderie'**, with some participants known to each other prior to membership and others forming connections solely through attending the group. The findings of this study corroborate those of McKenzie et al (2007, pp.122-127) who evidenced that within knitting groups the activity provided a 'conversation starter' with topics varying over the course of a session, enabling different levels of relationships to form between 'categorically known others'.

The social connections formed via attending a knitting group, were discussed by participants as enabling both anticipated and unexpected benefits in relation to their development and wellbeing. Participants discussed the atmosphere of groups as being both **'educative'** and **'encouraging'**, where members **'share knowledge and support one another'**. The supportive sociable atmosphere of groups was highlighted as important by participants who discussed joining a group specifically to receive **'help'** either when **'stuck'** with a project or with trying to learn a new technique. During observation, participants were seen giving help and support to each other through for example: feedback, provision of resources (knitting patterns, magazines, specialist needles), advice, suggestions, and demonstration of techniques. Prigoda & McKenzie (2007, p.108) have evidenced that within knitting groups

'relational information seeking, and giving without seeking, that normalised, reinforced, and reassured, was common'. In addition to developmental benefits, participants in this study discussed groups as being beneficial to their wellbeing in terms of providing '**enjoyment**' and '**something to look forward to**' in their routines. The benefits to health and wellbeing of knitting as a solitary activity has been evidenced within health literature (Riley, Corkhill & Morris, 2013). In addition, studies across a range of disciplines, have evidenced how group-based participation in textile-based craft activities are beneficial to wellbeing due to the provision of routine and peer support (Horghagen, Fostvedt & Alsaker, 2014; Robinson, 2020) the importance of social interaction and creativity for healthy aging amongst the elderly (Kenning, 2015) and knitting as a 'therapeutic activity' which 'promotes happiness' (Brooks, Ngan-Ta, Townsend & Backman, 2019, p.117)

Many of the members of knitting groups interviewed for this study were retired women with a long history of library use, who relayed positive perceptions of libraries originating from childhood experiences. However, participants discussed how using the library regularly for a knitting group had resulted in changed perceptions of libraries as having a '**different atmosphere**' and a '**different function**'. By using the library regularly as a place to connect with others, as opposed to visiting only to borrow books as had previously been their experience, libraries were regarded by participants as now more of a '**social thing**'. This sentiment was echoed in the findings of McKenzie et al (2007) qualitative study involving members of baby story time and knitting groups meeting in a public library, which evidenced a link between how forming social connections through purposive activity and the sharing of information enabled public libraries to function as a place for women.

In summary, this study has evidenced that for members of public library knitting groups, knitting is an activity which not only encourages and enables socialisation, but also is enhanced by the presence of others with shared interests and experiences. Participant motivations to join a public library group were predominantly social or developmental in nature, with the positive impact on their wellbeing in terms of enjoyment and the connection formed with others encouraging continued attendance. By having the opportunity to use the library socially, participants discussed a perceived change in the role of libraries in communities and a greater awareness of available library services beyond book borrowing.



These findings substantiate those of existing LIS research into the role of knitting groups in providing opportunities for socialisation within a public library (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007), how this facilitates the sharing of information and helps the library to function as place for women (McKenzie et al, 2007) and the significance of groups in providing routine (Robinson, 2020). Further however by involving groups in two branches in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow, contemporary empirical evidence is provided into the role of libraries as places for participation in communities and the positive impact local opportunities for socialisation are having on wellbeing which is an under researched area in the LIS literature.

### 5.2.2 Walking Groups

The walking groups included in this study were organised and operated independently of public library services, however the library role as a practical facilitator was valued by group members. Participants in both groups mentioned thinking that they would not be *'allowed'* to meet in the library, with both groups only initially using their local library as a *'meeting point'*. However, the shift to meeting inside the library was regarded as beneficial to groups providing a practical, warm, comfortable place which increased awareness of library services, provided access to local community information and aided socialisation amongst group members. Lenstra & Carlos (2019, p.1780) identified four areas in which public libraries enable and encourage walking in communities as a: 'resource for stories', 'community center', 'community partner' and 'walkable destination'. However as evidenced in this study, public libraries additionally have a purely facilitative role in supporting walking initiatives through the provision of a convenient and practical community meeting place for independent groups. The role of the library as a meeting place was important as participants highlighted a lack of other suitable alternative venues in their communities, correlating with studies evidencing a lack of meeting places in disadvantaged communities (Johnson, 2010).

Motivations discussed by participants for joining a walking group were varied, for some it provided *'something to do in the sense of fitness'*, influenced by interest, age or injury. For others it improved a typically solitary activity by providing a *'social activity'*, which was beneficial in relation to accessibility, safety, and companionship. Health and social factors have been found to provide motivations in terms of needs and expectations for walking group membership (Kassavou, Turner & French, 2015). In discussing the impact of the

group, motivations corresponded to perceived benefits, with participants in this study highlighting improvements in relation to both physical and mental wellbeing. As a physical activity walking was seen to aid fitness and mobility, with walking as part of a group encouraging participants to both take part and push themselves to walk further than they would alone. As a social activity which could be enjoyed outdoors, the group aided mental wellbeing by providing a source of enjoyment and relaxation, helping to reduce isolation and anxiety. These findings concur with those of numerous health studies which have evidenced that membership of a walking group has both physical and mental health benefits (Hanson, Guell & Jones, 2016). For example, a focus group study of the factors affecting sustained engagement in walking, qualitatively evidenced that walking groups provide a means of being active, socialising and connecting with nature which resulted in members 'feeling better'. (Raine, Roberts, Callaghan, Sydenham & Bannigan, 2017, p.185).

The regular nature of the walking groups, both of which met weekly throughout the year, was valued by participants in this study as a fixed part of their weekly routines. Continued attendance was motivated by the experienced benefit to physical or mental health. Attending the group was described as a **'high point in my week'** which if unable to attend negatively impacted on mood feeling in a **'downer'** with group attendance encouraging **'a different attitude you know you're not stuck in the house'**. In a qualitative study of a NHS walking group in a disadvantaged community consisting of members who had been medically referred, Hanson et al (2016, p.29-30) evidenced that perceived benefit motivated continued attendance. Despite initially sceptical of the wellbeing benefits of walking, participants continued to attend as the group became a 'purposeful activity' which positively impacted on 'everyday living' by providing 'embodied' physical benefits and 'enjoyment'. The findings of this study support those of Hanson et al (2016) in relation to wellbeing, however diverge in relation to the important social role of walking groups. Hanson et al (2016, p29-30) evidenced 'complex' attitudes towards the social aspect of the group, with the group functioning as a form of 'shared practice' where members 'identified' with others over shared 'health improvement goals' as opposed to more generally. Conversely in this study, participants some of whom had also been medically referred, suffered from a range of mobility issues, and revealed anxieties about fitting in or being able to fully participate, highly valued the social opportunities provided by the walking group.

This could be appreciated in the decision of most members to socialise with others during the activity, afterwards over coffee in the library or coffee shop and also outwith the group. In summary, this study evidenced that public libraries are appreciated as meeting places by walking group participants due to their comfort and convenience, aid to socialisation and lack of alternative options within disadvantaged communities. Through this facilitative role, public libraries are aiding both physical and mental wellbeing, with some walking group participants reporting an increase in fitness and mobility and a decrease in isolation and anxiety. These perceived benefits led to continued attendance, enabling groups to become a valued and fixed sociable part of participants regular routines. The findings of this study support those of studies in the health sector which have evidenced that membership of a walking group is beneficial to both physical and mental health (Hanson et al, 2016) and that a key aspect of this is the opportunity provided for socialisation (Kassavou et al., 2015; Raine et al., 2017). Despite a rise in the prevalence of public library operated or affiliated walking groups (Lenstra & Carlos, 2019), to date there have been no empirical LIS studies which have evidenced the experiences of members of walking groups. This study provides much needed qualitative insight into the facilitative role of libraries as a community meeting place which both enables and enhances participation in a walking group.

### 5.2.3 Bounce and Rhyme Groups

In discussing their motivations for attending bounce and rhyme most participants (mothers) mentioned the importance of aiding their child's development and a desire to provide '**a strong foundation from the beginning**'. This finding supports previous quantitative studies which have evidenced the positive impact of library based early years programs in relation to areas of child development such as early literacy behaviours (Campana et al, 2016) and language awareness (Cahill, Joo & Campana, 2020). Previous qualitative studies have provided insight into both the approaches used by library staff in aiding child development (e.g., Bamkin, Goulding & Maynard, 2013; Hedemark, 2017; Goulding, Dickie & Shuker, 2017). For example, in an ethnographic study of storytelling on mobile libraries, Bamkin et al (2013, p.57) evidenced the success of techniques during sessions designed to aid enjoyment and development such as 'engagement' (e.g., using interactive elements) and 'stretching' (e.g. incorporating counting and movement). This study (via observation) demonstrates the impact of both techniques with 'engagement' illustrated by a session facilitator using an

interactive lift the flap book during the session. Whilst 'stretching' could be observed in young children able to replicate hand movements such as a toddler (13mths) with English as a second language who attended regularly able to both verbally and physically participate during wheels on the bus by saying 'round round' and moving her arms in a circular motion.

Bounce and rhyme groups were viewed positively by participants as providing an opportunity for their child to socialise with other children. Participants spoke approvingly about both the developmental and social role of groups, with both discussed as motivating membership and regular attendance. The library atmosphere was viewed favourably, described by participants as '**comfortable**' and '**safe**'. For one study participant (mother), the positive perception of libraries enabled by attending the group with her child provided a catalyst to perception change attested to in the comment, '**libraries years ago to now definitely improved, they make you want to go in. Years ago they didn't**'. This finding concurs with those of Clark (2017, p.111) who in a quantitative study of parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of library early years programmes in Florida, found that the social interaction enabled by the library environment was viewed more positively than the learning achieved and that 'the environment of the program could incentivize participation'.

Bounce and Rhyme groups were discussed by participants (mothers) as important to them not just for their children, but for them personally as mothers. For example, some participants (mothers) discussed incorporating elements of bounce and rhyme into their home life, such as songs to help calm babies, and developing an increased awareness of the need to borrow '**all sorts of different books**' for their children following sessions. This finding supports those of a study of preschool storytime practices in New Zealand public libraries where Goulding et al (2017, p.209) evidenced that librarians act as 'reading mentors' for parents by demonstrating 'positive book-related interactions with children'. A further personal benefit discussed by participants (mothers) in this study was the importance of having the opportunity to socialise with other parents during and after bounce and rhyme sessions. During participant observation socialisation and sharing of information was evident in well attended groups, both independently between participants and supported and encouraged by staff. This finding corroborates those of Stooke & McKenzie (2009) who evidenced the important role of Canadian library programs in

enabling mothers to socialise to provide access to peer support and information. Further some participants who had reported experiencing feelings of isolation and anxiety, discussed attending the group as contributing to their personal wellbeing with one mother describing the group as *'therapy for mums'*. This finding mirrors those of a recent study by the Arts Council England (2018) which found attending rhyme sessions in public libraries to be beneficial to maternal mental health.

In summary, this study has evidenced that participants are motivated to attend bounce and rhyme sessions in libraries as they perceive the groups' core activities of singing, rhyming, and reading will aid child development. Further the opportunities afforded for both children and parents to socialise are regarded by participants as a benefit of attendance for both development and wellbeing reasons. Participants attending sessions held positive perceptions of both staff delivery and the library atmosphere, reporting techniques learned during sessions were being incorporated at home and that they were visiting the library outwith the group. Existing LIS studies evidencing the social and developmental benefits of early literacy library programmes have focused on the experiences of children (McKechnie, 2006), staff practices (Goulding et al, 2017) or parental perceptions of child development (Clark, 2017), with some discussion of the social benefits derived by mothers from attendance (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009). However, the findings of this study both support and extend existing research, to evidence the significance of the groups for the wellbeing of mothers in disadvantaged communities, enabled by the regular opportunity for socialisation and support enabled by group participation.

#### 5.2.4      Adult Literacy and Numeracy Groups

In discussing how they found out about library based adult literacy and numeracy groups (ALN) and what motivated membership many participants mentioned being referred by employment agencies, seeking to improve literacy skills in order to better perform in an existing role or secure employment. This verifies the findings of studies by both Nassimbeni & May (2009) and Varheim (2014) which found that participants attending public library literacy programs did so predominantly to aid employment prospects. However, whilst both Nassimbeni & May and Varheim found that word of mouth and outreach were the main methods of recruiting participants to library literacy programs, this study has evidenced that

participants were mainly referred by other agencies (health/employment etc), highlighting the important partnership links between Glasgow Libraries and outside agencies. Findings also demonstrated that ALN group membership went beyond improving employment prospects, to additionally aid wellbeing by providing a mechanism of empowerment through the provision of a range of everyday, enriching and enabling benefits.

Participants mentioned benefits in the course of their *'day to day life'* as being better able to fill in forms, conduct telephone bookings, and read text signs in shops and restaurants where previously they had relied on pictorial signs. One participant for example, discussed attending the group as part of a routine which provided an opportunity for personal progression and a mechanism of re-entering the community which *'restores your sense of worth, sense of ability'*, whilst other participants mentioned looking forward to attending with groups regarded as enjoyable with one commenting that *'When you come in you feel down, then when you leave you are happy, you are laughing'*. Elbeshausen (2007, p.103-104) in a study on ethnic minorities use of library learning labs, in predominantly disadvantaged areas, to develop information literacy and ICT skills defines empowerment in the library context as 'a special kind of learning' which involves acquiring 'abilities and skills' which aids a 'process of transition' from 'powerlessness' and 'helplessness' to 'autonomy' 'inclusion' and recognition'.

ALN groups differed from the other library groups included in this study, as membership was motivated by need as opposed to want. Amongst participants there was a collective sense that *'everybody's the same'* with members bonding over shared experiences of poor literacy, despite representing the greatest group demographic variety in terms of gender, age, employment status and disability. In discussing the group many participants acknowledged factors such as atmosphere, peer support, friendship, and staff attitudes as being important to their continued attendance and development. Some participants discussed problems learning in previous environments where they felt *'embarrassed and anxious'*, engaging in self-protecting behaviours as a tool to mask their difficulties such as being the *'class clown'*. Some stated that they *'wouldn't go to another group'* as they were *'happy now'* and so able to get *'help'* as it *'just feels right'*. This corroborates the findings of Nassimbeni & May's (2009, p.23-26) study exploring the role of South African public libraries

in helping 'people marginalised because of their poor literacy skills', which evidenced that place related factors are an 'important affective dimension of adult education in encouraging learning and communicative practices'. In addition to those of Elbeshausen (2007, p.109) who found that library ALN programs can provide a means of 'reintegration' for those who had previously experienced difficulties in formal learning environments.

In summary, this study has evidenced that whilst participants were initially motivated to attend public library ALN groups to aid their employment performance or prospects, they continued to attend due to interwoven developmental, social and wellbeing factors. Participants discussed a range of enriching and empowering benefits of both attending a group on a regular basis and applying the skills learned in their everyday lives. The findings of this study support existing limited LIS research evidencing motivations to participate in an ALN group (Nassimbeni & May, 2009; Varheim, 2014) and the public library factors conducive to enabling development (Elbeshausen, 2007; Nassimbeni & May, 2009). Further this study provides much needed contemporary qualitative insight into the benefits to health and wellbeing enabled via participation, building on existing evidence of empowerment amongst marginalised groups from participation (Elbeshausen, 2007), to evidence additional wellbeing benefits derived from enjoyment of the social aspects of groups.

### 5.2.5 Creative Writing Groups

Creative writing for most participants was valued as an activity which enabled '*expression*' providing the opportunity to '*share something which is unique to your point of view*'. For participants suffering from mental illness, creative writing was described as '*cathartic*'. Most participants wrote both at home and during the group, about a variety of subjects such as hobbies, interests, or positive and negative life experiences. Some participants related a desire to record their own life story or that of a loved one. The findings of this study correlate with others evidencing the multiple meanings experienced by people who write creatively. In a qualitative study of the therapeutic benefits of creative writing for cancer patients Bolton (2008) evidenced the importance of creative writing for facilitating self-expression and providing a cathartic outlet during palliative care. Further Griffin, Harvey, Gillett & Andrews (2019, p.8-9) evidenced that for some elderly participants of Canadian public library creative writing groups, writing about their own life experiences or those of a

loved one was a 'deliberate act of remembrance' allowing creative writing to serve as a 'therapeutic' leisure activity.

In discussing what initially motivated membership and encouraged continued attendance, participants from both creative writing groups discussed the role group members could or do play in the development of their writing. In one group, newly formed, this was expressed as a want, whereas in the other established group was related as being the case. In both groups included in this study, a timed creative writing exercise incorporating the title of a library book was conducted during sessions to stimulate creativity, with members sharing their work with the group during the session. Some participants preferred to share a piece written prior to the group meeting. The role of the group in the generation of '*ideas*' and the sharing of '*work*' was valued for the opportunity to then receive or provide both '*critical*' and '*supportive feedback*'. In a mixed methods study of professionally facilitated writing workshops for refugees held in community centres in three UK cities, Stickley, Hui, Stuble, Baker, & Watson (2019) found participants valued being able to learn both with and from group members via the sharing work and receiving feedback.

Participants highlighted that, '*the company as well as the writing*' was an enjoyable aspect of participation in a creative writing group. In the established group, where the majority of participants had experience of physical or mental illness, participants highlighted benefits in relation to their wellbeing as the group provided a sociable and supportive environment for '*talking through problems*' where members '*give each other boosts*' when discussing personal matters. Studies have evidenced the benefits to wellbeing for people, both with and without mental or physical illness, from participation in a community based creative writing groups (Dingle, Williams, Jetten & Welch, 2017). This study supports the findings of a mixed methods study of participants perspectives of bonding and wellbeing enabled by engaging in a creative arts class (singing, writing, or crafting) which evidenced that regular social interaction facilitated bonding and connection (Pearce et al, 2016) and the development of a supportive environment amongst members (Pearce, 2016). Further, in a study of creative writing groups held in care homes, elderly participants discussed the role of group activity in helping to stimulate social relationships via the supportive environment experienced during participation (Brown Wilson, Tetley, Healey & Wolton, 2011).



For some participants in this study the group was valued as an **'escape'** from other aspects of their lives, with simply **'having somewhere to go'** regarded as beneficial. Participants discussed a range of limiting life factors such as motherhood, unemployment and illness which made the location of the group an important factor in participation. Participants regarded the library as a good meeting place for the group for as it was **'safe', 'free', 'local', 'relaxed'** in addition to factors which specifically aided the activity of the group such as being **'quiet'** and **'surrounded by books'**. The findings of this study substantiate those of others such as Stickley et al, (2019) which have evidenced the importance to mental wellbeing of having structured activities, like a creative writing group, for those whose life circumstances have a limiting impact on their ability to participate in regular activities.

In summary, this study evidenced that public libraries were appreciated by creative writing group members for providing an accessible space for groups to meet which was conducive to development. The opportunity for support, stimulation, and socialisation with others in the library with shared interests or experiences motivated continued attendance. Creative writing was valued as a therapeutic activity by participants, with the addition of a group element enabling enhanced benefits to wellbeing. The findings of this study support existing limited LIS research which has evidenced the therapeutic motivations associated with creative writing (Griffin et al., 2019). Further this study builds on this, by corroborating the findings of studies in the health sector which have evidenced that writing as part of a group provides an opportunity for socialisation (Brown Wilson et al., 2011; Pearce, 2016) which enables development (Stickley et al., 2019) and is of benefit to wellbeing (Pearce et al., 2016; Dingle et al., 2017; Stickley et al., 2019). As a result, this study provides much needed qualitative insight into how public libraries specifically aid creative writing in communities via the distinctive library environment which provides both resources and an atmosphere valued by members.

### 5.2.6      Book Groups

Most participants included in this study were lifelong readers and library users, for whom reading was an activity which had been valued since childhood. Participants identified as readers, highlighting the enjoyment derived from **'sitting down with a good story'**. In

discussing why they read and what it did for them, most participants described reading in relation to wellbeing as something which made them **'happy'**, with most describing reading as a therapeutic activity which helped them to **'relax'**, provided **'comfort'**, or a way to **'shut off'**, to **'take them away'** from and **'escape'** difficult situations. In addition, participants valued reading for intellectual reasons as providing a tool to **'widen your horizons and learn'** which **'keeps your brain functioning better'**. This finding corroborates those of Rothbauer & Dalmer (2018, p.170) who evidenced that reading provides a 'lifeline' to vulnerable groups such as the elderly for whom reading for pleasure has long provided a means of 'escape' and 'enjoyment' and 'resilience' in old age.

Most of the participants observed and interviewed were retired women who now, due to a change in life circumstances, found themselves with free time to join a group. For some of those participants a book group was chosen because of the primary activity of reading, specifically for enjoyment, an ambition to read more widely, more often or the opportunity for **'expression'** sharing their opinion on books they had read. Whereas for other participants, joining a book group was motivated by social reasons such as a desire for **'company'** or to make **'new friends'**. The findings of this study correlate with those of others which have evidenced that book groups both 'encourage reading and build relationships' (MacGillivray, Ardell Lassiter, Curwen Saucedo & Wiggin, 2019, p.16). In a study of therapeutic reading groups operating in public libraries Walwyn & Rowley (2011, p.310) evidenced that members were motivated to join due to a desire to 'broaden and satisfy their reading experience' as well as a desire for 'companionship, friendship, support, and advice'. In addition, Clarke, Hookway & Burgess (2017, p.174) evidenced in a quantitative study of the community role of book groups in the regional community of Tasmania that 'community and education' motivated membership and that as a result groups were 'highly valued' as they provided members with 'an important source of social and cultural capital'.

Book groups were inherently social in nature, with discussion a key aspect of group meetings. As highlighted by participants during interview and observed by the researcher during meetings, conversations at book groups were not limited to the book being discussed. In many instances the shared experience of reading a book provided a starting point for wider topics of conversation, with both personal and everyday information

exchanged purposively and serendipitously amongst group members. As noticed by the researcher during observation and mentioned by participants during interview, meeting in the library influenced discussions as books were spotted on display or leaflets were passed amongst members. Participants were known to each other either solely via regular attendance at the group over several years, a pre-existing relationship with member(s) or additional social interaction out with the group. The social atmosphere was valued by participants, enabling them to *'discuss other things'* and *'share information'*. The findings of this study support those of Sedo (2003, p.81) who in a quantitative comparative study of members experiences of face to face and online book groups, found that the most satisfying aspect of book groups for those which met face to face were 'the social bonds formed in groups'. Further, Walwyn & Rowley (2011, p.308-310) evidenced that participants were motivated to attend meetings of a therapeutic reading group due a desire for 'conversation' with groups viewed as providing a 'rare opportunity for women to get together and talk', with the social contact 'sustained over a period' enabled by regular interaction, was found to be important in generating relationships.

Participants discussed a range of benefits to their wellbeing as a result of book group membership. For example, some elderly participants with mobility concerns highlighted that the group gave them a *'purpose'* or helped them to feel *'not so isolated'* due to the scheduled opportunity for *'local' socialisation*. For others, the group brought them *'enjoyment'* or something *'just for me'* in a routine dominated by family commitments. For one participant deciding to join a group *'without somebody'* had provided a confidence boost, as they now would have *'no problem'* doing that again. The findings of this study support those of MacGillivray et al (2019, p.10-11) who in a longitudinal qualitative study of a mandatory book club in a woman's rehabilitation centre, evidenced that participating in a book group was an act of both 'self-care and self-improvement'. Participants in the study derived benefits to their health and wellbeing via the social function of the group which developed feelings of 'identity', 'belonging' and 'normalcy' amongst members. In addition, Shipman & McGrath (2016, p.418) who in a qualitative study of two reading groups for members with mental health conditions either held in or ran by public libraries, evidenced benefits to wellbeing and mental health via the development of 'positive relationships and experience of belonging' enabled through the use of books as a 'tool for social facilitation'.

In summary, this study has evidenced that participants were motivated to attend a book group because of the value they place on reading as a source of wellbeing and development and a desire to enhance the experience via socialisation in the comfortable and familiar environment of a public library. The social nature of groups, where discussions encompassed a shared book whilst extending further to general and personal topics, was valued by participants enabling the formation of social connections. The sharing of information was perceived as beneficial by members in a range of areas, such as facilitating an increased awareness of wider cultural opportunities beyond the book group. The positive experience of attending the group was perceived by members as beneficial to their wellbeing, encouraging regular sustained attendance. The findings of this study support existing research across a range of disciplines which have evidenced that book groups are valued by participants for social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing reasons (Sedo, 2003; Clarke et al., 2017; Rothbauer & Dalmer, 2018; MacGillivray et al., 2019). Further the findings of this study build on existing qualitative LIS evidence of the benefits to wellbeing of participation in a book groups enabled by the opportunity for sustained socialisation (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Shipman & McGrath, 2016). The focus of these studies has been specifically on therapeutic book groups, with benefits derived by participants with mental health conditions, however this study evidences the universality of benefits to wellbeing of book groups, regardless of specific reading material focus or targeted audiences.

## 5.3 Shared themes identified across groups

### 5.3.1 Social

Public libraries have an important social role in providing a 'route for individuals, including those who experience deep isolation, to enter and engage with the community and wider society' (Johnson 2010, p.148). By providing a vibrant accessible multipurpose space within communities where people from all walks of life can interact, public libraries can 'enhance disadvantaged people's access to social networks that will empower them' (Phillipson et al., 2004, p7). However, despite providing a hub in communities, research has evidenced that 'unmediated contact' between library users is not common, with instead library events and groups providing a 'catalyst' to socialisation (Miller, 2014, p.323). This section explores participants shared experiences of the social aspects of membership of a public library group across six different activities. This substantial research focus provides much needed

empirical insight of the key social role of public library groups, irrespective of activity, in encouraging connection, combating isolation, and providing a catalyst to positive perception change of the social value of public libraries in disadvantaged communities.

This study has evidenced that for many participants, joining a library group was motivated by a desire for socialisation, supporting similar findings in relation to knitting (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007), walking (Kassavou et al., 2015) and book groups (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011). However, this study provides depth of insight by exploring the social motivations discussed by participants across six groups to evidence three motivational aspects which encouraged participation in a library group: meeting others in a shared situation, with a shared interest or a shared locality. Firstly, participants in this study represented a range of different life stages and circumstances, from motherhood to retirement, which for some provided the motivation to join a public library group in order to meet new people who were in the same situation. Secondly, for other participants there was a desire ***'to meet other people with a shared interest'***, as within their existing social network they felt they did not have anyone they could pursue their interest in a specific activity with. In addition, thirdly for some participants, particularly families and the elderly, a desire to connect with other people locally motivated membership with groups providing a conduit to socialisation valued primarily ***'for the company more than anything else'***, as opposed to for the opportunity to pursue a specific interest.

The varied social motivations evidenced amongst participants for joining a public library group, expand on existing evidence that individuals can use public libraries to 'compensate' for a deficiency in their existing social network (Johnson, 2010, p.148). This study has demonstrated how library groups, as opposed to general library use, help to expand social networks enabling connections to form via the opportunity for sustained social interaction amongst members. Research has found that book groups for example are valued for providing 'companionship' (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011, p.308) and as an important 'tool for social facilitation' (Shipman & McGrath, 2016, p.418). Further in two related Canadian public library qualitative studies the shared activity of knitting has been evidenced as providing a 'conversation starter' which aids socialisation (McKenzie et al, 2007, p.127) in addition to the role of children's library programming in helping to build 'tightly knit social network'

over time, via initial conversation focusing on 'safe topics' which provides 'vehicles for the forging of more meaningful connections' (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009, p.670). This study supports these findings (McKenzie et al, 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Shipman & McGrath, 2016) however by exploring this process in greater depth, additionally evidences that the varied programming available in public libraries provides a mechanism of enabling people of all ages to connect more easily with others in communities through local participation in a familiar shared activity.

The sustained socialisation enabled by routine participation in a library group, amongst others initially motivated by a shared situation, interest, or locality, was found to provide the building blocks needed to form deeper social connections. This could be appreciated in participant discussion of groups as having progressed beyond simply providing '*interaction*' and '*conversation*' to enabling the development of '*friendship*' and '*camaraderie*' through bonding over the sharing of '*stories*' and all kinds of '*information*' on an ongoing basis. Research has demonstrated the importance of regular group participation in enabling bonding and connection in creative writing groups (Pearce et al, 2016) and the development of 'social bonds' (Sedo, 2003), 'positive relationships and experience of belonging' (Shipman & McGrath, 2016, p.418) and feelings of 'identity', 'belonging' and 'normalcy' (MacGillivray et al., 2019, p.10-11) in book groups. Further, research has proven that sharing information in a group setting can contribute to bonding (Prigoda & Mckenzie 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009). The findings of this study support previous studies evidencing the important role of groups in enabling bonding and connection, enhancing understanding of this process in the library context. Across six different types of activity, group membership was observed and discussed as having strengthened pre-existing connections between acquaintances and neighbours and forged new bonds between strangers and library staff, via the sustained socialisation and sharing of information enabled via regular interaction in communities.

This study has evidenced that public library groups stimulate socialisation in communities by offering opportunities for participation in varied shared activities, with the significance of the library as place demonstrated as helping to sustain socialisation amongst groups and so aid connection and bonding. Participants discussed the library atmosphere as conducive to socialisation, providing a '*comfortable*', '*encouraging*' and '*welcoming*' place for groups to

meet. Further participants highlighted examples of how libraries encouraged socialisation for groups such as through the provision of refreshments, comfortable seating, and friendly familiar staff. Prigoda & McKenzie (2007) in a small qualitative study of a knitting group held in one Canadian public library branch evidenced the importance of a shared activity in conjunction with the library as the place where the group is held in enabling participation and encouraging socialisation. This study, via observation of 12 library groups over 48 group sessions in 9 library branches, supports, and significantly extends this finding to evidence, irrespective of activity, the important combination of activity and atmosphere in enabling and encouraging socialisation in public libraries.

Attending a public library group was valued by participants for providing a regular **'social activity'** within everyday routines. In addition, this study evidenced a further social dimension, with the bonds and connections formed via regular participation generating additional opportunities for socialisation beyond attending the group. Additional socialisation opportunities, both those in conjunction with and independently of the library, were discussed as a benefit of membership. Participants highlighted purposeful ways in which library venues and staff encouraged socialisation beyond the group such as the availability of café facilities in branches, organised visits to other cultural venues and special events. The importance of additional socialisation opportunities in connecting people and helping the library to function as place for group members can be attested to in for example one branch which **'brought everybody together'** by hosting a 90th birthday party with a participant commenting **'If we never had the library we wouldn't have thought of that'**. In addition, participants discussed attending charity nights organised by members, birthday parties, trips, lunches etc with the extent to which members socialised outwith the group varying both from group to group and within groups. This finding signifies an enhanced understanding of the social role of library groups in areas of multiple deprivations.

In exploring the social role of public library groups in the everyday lives of participants living in disadvantaged communities, this study found that library groups provided an important mechanism of combating social isolation. Several participants raised the subject of isolation in relation to themselves or others, with joining a library group discussed as a conscious strategy to either alleviate existing feelings of isolation or prevent those feelings from

developing. Membership of a public library group was appreciated by some members as helping them to *'feel I'm not so isolated'*. This was most prominent amongst elderly participants who lived alone, with one for example stressing how vital it was simply *'being able to speak to people'* at group sessions. Further feelings of isolation and loneliness were not limited to retired participants but were also mentioned by new mothers in relation to themselves *'I'm gonna kind of be myself with baby'* and their children *'she is alone with me, only with me in the house, she can communicate with other people'*. The findings of this study support those evidencing feelings of isolation as providing a motivation for participation in public library reading groups for people suffering from mental health problems (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011) and creative writing groups for the elderly (Griffin et al., 2019). However, additionally this study qualitatively evidences the important role of public library groups in alleviating feelings of isolation via both the provision of routine opportunities for socialisation whilst attending a group and further opportunities for socialisation generated through the expansion of social networks.

Having the opportunity to use the library socially as a member of a library group, irrespective of activity, was discussed by many participants as providing a catalyst to perception change of the *'function'* of public libraries. Public libraries were discussed by many participants as having *'changed'*, perceived as more *'relaxed'* and *'better for communities'* due to the provision of *'more things to do'*. Positive perceptions of the library environment enabled via group participation can be typified in one participant's comment that *'you can laugh and folk don't come up and tell you shh...it's just a totally different atmosphere now'*. In a pilot study of storytelling sessions in Swedish public libraries Hedemark (2017, p.122) found through observation that library staff viewed the provision of organised children's activities as an opportunity to 'show the library as place' to families. This study enhances our understanding of the connection between library activities and perceptions of place, by exploring this process across a much broader participant demographic focusing on the experiences of participants as opposed to the expectations of library staff. A strength of this study is the ability to significantly extend Hedemark's (2017, p.122) work on the 'problematization of the concept of participation', by empirically evidencing that participation in a library group provides both an opportunity to see the library as place, and also additionally a mechanism of becoming place.



This study has provided much needed evidence of current user perceptions of public libraries in disadvantaged communities, which reflect perception change resulting from participation in a library group in addition to more broadly generationally. Most of the participants in this study were over the age of 60 and in sharing their childhood experiences of libraries recalled them as being somewhere **'You just went, got a book and took it back when the time was up'**. Whilst most participants shared mainly positive nostalgic memories of the libraries of their childhood, including concerning branches they still currently used, many chose to highlight the quiet atmosphere which was the norm at that time with for example one participant confiding **'I think then you felt you were imposing on a space that really was to be silent and not shared'**. This study provides depth of insight of user perceptions of a contemporary shift towards a more 'participatory culture' (Rasmussen, 2016, p.553). Participants, both those who have used libraries continuously since childhood and those returning to participate in a public library group, shared that they were **'astonished at the changes in libraries'** agreeing that when previously using a public library **'it wasn't the sort of social thing it is now'**.

In summary, this study has evidenced that irrespective of activity, public library groups play a key social role in the everyday lives of participants. Social motivations for participation were multifaceted with participants discussing purposefully joining a library group to facilitate meeting people who shared their interests, were at a similar stage in their life or lived within their local community. In sharing their experiences of membership, participant responses highlighted the benefit of public library groups in facilitating social connection as opposed to solely social interaction with the opportunity for sustained socialisation alleviating feelings of social isolation by enabling connection and encouraging bonding. Findings support and extend existing understanding of the role of group participation in a shared activity in facilitating bonding (e.g., Sedo, 2003; Prigoda & McKenzie 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009; Pearce et al, 2016; Shipman & McGrath, 2016; MacGillivray et al., 2019, Griffin et al., 2019), by exploring the role of the library in this process. By foregrounding the library as the place where groups meet, this study has evidenced the dual importance of both activity and atmosphere in enabling bonding and connection. Additionally, this study has responded to Rasmussen's (2016, p.550) call for more research evidencing the 'users point of view' on the shift to more participatory public libraries, demonstrating that public

library groups by connecting both people and place, positively influence participants perceptions of public libraries. A further strength of this study is the ability to evidence the value participants place on the beneficial impact group participation has had on their social life, in addition to how this positively influenced participants perceptions of the social value of public libraries which is an under researched area (Sin & Vakkari, 2015).

### 5.3.2      Developmental

Public libraries have a well-established developmental role, utilised by people of all ages and abilities as a place within communities for independent as well as group learning, both structured and unstructured. The term development is a broad concept, however for the purpose of this study development is understood simply as reflecting the process of progression. This section explores the developmental role of public library groups in enabling participants to learn new skills and improve existing ones in areas of both personal and professional interest and need. Empirical evidence is provided of the mechanism public library groups provide in aiding literacy development amongst two demographics: adults with low literacy levels and preschool children. Further the links between literacy development and lifelong learning are evidenced by exploring the role of public library groups with a predominantly social or cultural focus, from the perspective of participants, as providing valued sites for learning and development.

This study has evidenced that place related factors such as environment and atmosphere were valued as being conducive to literacy development amongst both adults with low literacy levels and preschool children. Participants from both adult literacy and early literacy groups shared that they found the library an *'ideal'* place for development due to the availability of *'books'* and *'quiet'* spaces and a *'comfortable'*, *'welcoming'* and *'relaxing'* environment. These factors were important for some participants of both groups who discussed how they had helped ease initial feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, or difficulty, by finding the library to be a friendly and fun place where they could *'enjoy'* learning. The important 'affective' role of place related factors in 'encouraging learning' amongst adult learners in public libraries has been evidenced by Nassimbeni & May (2009 p.23-26). Whilst positive perceptions of the library as providing a 'warm, caring and supportive environment' during children's activities have been found to 'incentivize participation' amongst parents

(Clark 2007, p.110-111). The findings of this study support and extend those of both studies to qualitatively evidence across both adult and early literacy library groups that the library as the place where the group is held, both enables and encourages literacy development.

Whilst many of the groups included in this study had limited direct staff involvement, both developmental groups were led by staff with the importance of their approach and attitude observed by the researcher and highlighted by participants as aiding both adult and child literacy development. Participants (adults and families) were observed positively engaging with staff during sessions, receiving both one-on-one support in addition to collectively within the group. Participants discussed the role of staff as beneficial to literacy development through the provision of help, support, and encouragement whilst delivering sessions in addition to their willingness to answer queries, provide information and signpost to other relevant services or resources. This can be attested to for example in one participant commenting that a session leader was *'just so lovely she makes it easy to go'* and another participant describing a session leader as a *'big help'*. Goulding et al (2017) has evidenced the role of library staff approach in aiding early literacy development and engaging families, however the research methodology adopted focused only on the developmental aspirations of staff delivering sessions as opposed to those of parents for their children in participating. Whilst Lopez, Caspe & Simpson (2017, p.324) also utilised a research methodology focusing on staff perspectives, to quantitatively evidence the importance of 'welcoming staff' for engaging families in learning programs, as opposed to the perceptions of program participants. The findings of this study however, by focusing on the perspectives of library group members, enhance the findings of both Goulding et al (2017) and Lopez et al (2017) to provide qualitative evidence of the dual importance of both staff approach and attitude in the success of developmental library groups for both families and adults with low literacy levels in disadvantaged communities.

Beyond the facilitative role of the library, participants stressed the importance of fellow group members in aiding literacy development. Participants attending bounce and rhyme groups discussed being initially motivated to participate to meet other parents and children, whilst for members of adult literacy groups the bonds formed through attendance encouraged continued participation. Participants from both adult and child library groups

highlighted friendship with other people in a similar situation as a benefit of participation. This was particularly important in the context of adult literacy with participants sharing a perception that despite significant age and gender differences, that **'Everybody's the same'**, which enabled the giving and receiving of **'help'** amongst members. Varheim (2014) has evidenced the importance of feeling equal to building trust, enabling learning, and generating social capital in public library programs. Further Hanson et al (2016, p.29-30) found that for members of a medically referred walking group in a disadvantaged community the activity was perceived as a 'shared practice' which enabled members to bond in terms of their shared need as opposed to more broadly. This study extends these findings to empirically evidence this process in both adult and child literacy groups in disadvantaged communities, where most participants were recommended to groups via employment or health agencies and were able to connect over the shared practice of literacy development for themselves or their child.

This study has evidenced that development, when understood from the perspective of library group participants themselves, extends beyond literacy to incorporate personal development in relation to a desire for improvement in a specific skill/area of interest. This finding provides qualitative insight into the need to understand lifelong learning from the perspective of users and how they purposively and serendipitously use public libraries to aid their own development at different stages in their lives in areas of both interest and need. Many participant responses highlighted a view that library groups were perceived as sites for learning with the group activity a **'skill that I wanted to learn'**, which could be developed through participation. Above discussion of factors which aided literacy development were echoed by many members of social (knitting and walking) and cultural (creative writing and reading) library groups in relation to their own development in the group's activity. Many participants across these groups discussed the importance of the library as the place where the activity was held and the facilitative role of staff in encouraging sustained participation by helping them to feel welcome. This study supports and extends LIS research evidencing the conscious use of reading groups to provide 'educational experiences' (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011, p.308) and a tool for 'self-improvement' (MacGillivray et al., 2019, p.10-11). In addition to the role of pre-existing perceptions of the library as place via lifelong use of the library for leisure and development, in enabling and encouraging participation in

knitting (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007) and creative writing groups (Griffin et al., 2019), with these processes found to be evident across all four activities.

The most important factor in aiding development for participants of social and cultural library groups were fellow group members. In sharing why they chose to participate as part of a group in activities which could be enjoyed alone, many participants highlighted that both the regular nature of attendance and the presence of other people provided both motivation and encouragement to persevere and progress. For example, participants shared that group participation provided *'discipline'* and *'makes'* them spend time on an activity rather than be *'lazy'*, whilst other participants highlighted that group members *'give each other boosts'* providing an *'educative'* and *'encouraging'* atmosphere. This differed from the responses of participants from developmental literacy groups who were motivated by need (e.g., for adults in relation to seeking or succeeding in employment and parents to provide a strong educational foundation for their child) as opposed to want. Within social and cultural activity groups participants also discussed the importance to their development of being able to share *'work'*, *'ideas'* and *'knowledge'* and receive *'help'*, *'support'* and *'feedback'*. This study supports and extends across additional activities, Walwyn & Rowley (2011, p.308) finding that interaction between group members within a therapeutic reading group is important in providing 'companionship, friendship, support, and advice' which helped to boost 'confidence' and provide a mechanism of 'empowerment'.

This study has empirically evidenced the key developmental role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities for people of all ages and abilities via the provision of opportunities for participation, irrespective of activity, in a public library group. The concept of development, when qualitatively informed by the perspectives of public library group participants, focusing on their shared motivations, experiences, and sense of impact, provides unique depth of insight to reveal how public library groups provide a tool for both enabling literacy development and lifelong learning. Of particular importance in this process are dual facilitative factors of place and people, which both encourage and enable participation and so aid development. A strength of this study is the ability to significantly extend existing understanding of these shared factors across six types of public library group, previously only evidenced in relation to a single activity e.g., knitting (Prigoda &

McKenzie, 2007), writing (Griffin et al., 2019), reading (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; MacGillivray et al., 2019) and literacy development amongst adults (Nassimbeni & May, 2009) and children (Clark, 2007; Goulding et al, 2017; Lopez et al., 2017).

### 5.3.3 Cultural

As publicly funded community based cultural institutions, public libraries as reflected in both their original purpose and enduring professional practice, are important in inclusively addressing the inequity of both physical access to and intellectual accessibility of culture (Birdi et al., 2008). Further public libraries have an important enabling cultural role which both encompasses and extends beyond enhancing awareness, appreciation, enjoyment, and understanding of library collections, to encouraging cultural participation. This role is reflected in the recent 'Culture Strategy for Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2020, p.40) which recognises the importance of enabling 'enriching' cultural participation. However, social research has evidenced a cultural divide in the UK with residents in disadvantaged communities least likely to participate in cultural activities (Warwick Commission 2015; Scottish Government, 2016), additionally a lack of childhood encouragement has been highlighted as a contributory factor in the cycle of disengagement (Scottish Government, 2010; Miles & Sullivan, 2012). This section will evidence the contribution of library groups, understood irrespective of activity as a form of cultural participation, in relation to the contemporary cultural role of public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations. To provide holistic understanding, both the childhood and contemporary experiences of members of public library groups will be examined. By exploring the capacity of public libraries to serve as 'cultural hubs' and the mechanisms, such as the provision of varied social, developmental and cultural library groups via which they 'can connect communities and change lives' (Carnegie UK Trust, 2014b), this section provides much needed empirically informed insight in an under researched area.

For most participants involved in this study, the origins of the cultural role of public libraries could be found in childhood use, illustrated by one participant commenting that as a child they were '***taken there...so it's always been part of my life***'. Parents, particularly mothers, were discussed by many participants as having an important role in encouraging library use and creating a home environment which modelled and promoted a love of reading, which

some participants discussed replicating with their own children/grandchildren. Craig (2019) in a comprehensive mixed methods study of women's book group participation in America and Ireland, evidenced that positive early experiences of library use, and maternal encouragement had a significant impact on lifelong reading habits and the motivation to join a book group. Whilst Craig (2019) explores the foundational cultural role of libraries amongst book group members, the study by not actually incorporating members of library-based book groups is limited in its potential contribution to understanding the contemporary cultural role of public libraries. The findings of this study support and expand on Craig (2019) to evidence the significance to adult cultural participation of positive childhood cultural experiences amongst members of library book groups as well as additionally amongst some members of walking, knitting, bounce and rhyme and creative writing groups. Further this study has evidenced that the absence of parental encouragement or early library use, had a negative impact on both reading for pleasure and lifelong library use amongst some participants with this most noticeable amongst, but not limited to, members of adult literacy and numeracy groups.

Many participants discussed using public libraries at different stages throughout their lives for varied activities such as book borrowing, pc usage, classes, paid and voluntary work, study and children's activities. For some a continued connection with libraries purposively or serendipitously led to membership of a public library group. Research has evidenced in relation to knitting (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007) and creative writing (Griffin et al., 2019) that library use can motivate participation in library groups. Both studies foreground the significance of the library as place in this process with Prigoda & McKenzie (2007, p.103) arguing that 'participation... signalled a shared commitment to the library and its functions'. Further Griffin et al (2019, p.7) evidenced that when the library functioned as a 'third place' this encouraged participation in group activity as there was a positive perception that groups would be enjoyable and comprised of 'likeminded people'. The findings of this study support and extend the work of Prigoda & McKenzie (2007) and Griffin et al (2019) to evidence the significance of existing library use in motivating library group membership across four additional types of activity. Further, this study has evidenced that the appeal of library groups extends beyond existing library users. Library groups, irrespective of activity, were demonstrated as having an important enabling role in bringing lapsed users back to

and drawing non-users into public libraries. For some participants, particularly returning and new users, group participation facilitated the library becoming a third place and led to a positive change in perception of the importance of libraries.

Library collections are foundational to the cultural role of public libraries and an intrinsic feature of the library as place. Reader development activities for adults and children which feature and promote books, are a mechanism long utilised to engage users with library collections. Participants in this study discussed library collections as an aspect of group participation. Members of cultural groups highlighted the intellectual and creative importance of being *'surrounded by books'* in the library and the capacity of reading to *'widen your horizons'*. Members of developmental groups stressed the library as an *'ideal'* place as *'seeing all the books'*, *'encourages'* reading and borrowing. Whilst members of social groups shared that attending a group in a library facilitated book borrowing and influenced group conversations towards books. Further participants, across groups, discussed the important intermediary role of staff recommending titles and creating displays in aiding their book borrowing whilst attending a library group. Research has evidenced that book group participation enables members to 'broaden and satisfy their reading experience' (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011, p.310). Further children's library activities have been found to facilitate 'exposure' (Peterson et al., 2012, p.15) to new titles modelled by library staff during sessions in addition to through the opportunity to 'explore' (Bamkin et al., 2013, p.50) the library through participation and encounter books. This study supports and extends, across six groups, findings in relation to adult and child literacy groups. Further this study evidenced an intermediary role amongst both staff and fellow participants as both visiting the library and conversing with fellow members enabled an increased awareness of different genres and authors.

This study evidenced that public library groups provided a mechanism of enabling and encouraging cultural participation in areas of multiple deprivations. In sharing their motivations for joining a library group, participant responses represented a varied range of interests, needs and personal circumstances which correlated with discussion of drivers and barriers to wider cultural participation identified in the survey component of interviews, specifically concerning why participants did/did not visit other cultural places, attend



cultural events, or participate in cultural activities. Shared motivators to cultural participation such as activity interest, a desire for socialisation, benefit to wellbeing, aid to development, and practical considerations provide evidence of the positive impact of a contemporary professional shift towards a more participatory cultural offer. Participant responses demonstrated that this shift to offering regular varied enjoyable opportunities for participation is increasing the importance and relevance of public libraries within communities. Hedemark (2017, p.121) in a study of children's story time sessions has evidenced the extent to which 'historical and institutional' library practice, reflected in the image of the silent library solely encouraged as a site for cultural consumption, can impact on contemporary participation. The findings of this study respond to Hedemark's (2017, p.122) call for research exploring 'the interplay between the limitations and possibilities of participation' in cultural activities in public libraries, to evidence the role of six types of cultural activities in providing a catalyst to both positive perception change and meaningful purposeful engagement with public libraries across a broad participant demographic.

Participation in a public library group enabled many participants to develop an increased awareness of opportunities for cultural participation beyond the group. Participants highlighted that regularly visiting the library to attend a group helped them to keep up to date both ***'with what's going on in the library'*** in addition to opportunities for cultural participation beyond the library via leaflets, posters and staff recommendation and promotion. Stooke & Mckenzie (2009) have evidenced that participating in children's library activities provides parents with a mechanism of obtaining information purposively flagged up by session leaders and via leaflets available in the library. This study supports and extends these findings across additional adult activities, evidencing a ***'multiplier effect'*** (Fisher et al, 2004, p.762) enabled via routine participation which facilitates the sharing and encountering of information. Further, key to this process as stressed by participants themselves is the social sharing of information, influenced by the group location, in increasing awareness of opportunities for cultural participation beyond the library which they perceived as a benefit. Participants discussed serendipitously and purposively sharing recommendations of activities to try, places to visit which they thought group members, whose tastes and interests they had come to know via regular interaction, ***'would have been interested'*** in. Research has evidenced that book groups are 'highly valued' by

members for providing ‘an important source of social and cultural capital’ (Clarke et al., 2017, p.174), this study has evidenced that the social sharing of information concerning opportunities for cultural participation as an aspect of this process.

In summary, this study has explored the contemporary cultural role of public libraries by focusing on the provision of public library groups (knitting, walking, bounce and rhyme, adult literacy and numeracy, creative writing and book groups), which as forms of library based cultural participation, are characteristic of a professional shift towards a more participatory cultural offer which extends beyond ‘collection’ to enable ‘connection’ (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016). This study evidenced that this shift resonated positively with many participants who were actively seeking opportunities for participation, motivated by a range of interests, needs and personal circumstances with the diverse range of library groups available important in extending their appeal to a wide demographic. Positive experiences of participation provided a catalyst to perception change and increased the relevance and importance of public libraries amongst existing users and previous non-users. Public library groups were demonstrated as providing valued sites for the production and appropriation of culture, with library collections an important feature of library group participation utilised for inspiration and interest in cultural groups, providing a source of encouragement to developmental groups and a conduit to conversation within social groups. Further empirical insight has been provided of the role of regular library group attendance in increasing the accessibility and awareness of cultural objects/events and places, via both intermediary staff practices and the social sharing of information amongst group members.

#### 5.3.4      Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a term which whilst applied widely, lacks clarity and consistency in definition and application (Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders, 2012). For the purposes of this study, wellbeing is understood as reflective of an individual’s positive emotions and perceived capacity for agency in their everyday life. To represent the dominant participant demographic included in this study, this understanding has been informed by discussions of wellbeing in the context of the elderly and mentally ill which focus on the importance of ‘how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they

evaluate their lives as a whole' (New Economics Foundation, 2012). Public libraries contribute to health and wellbeing across a host of different domains at a societal, community and individual level (Carnegie UK Trust, 2014a). Whilst contemporary research has sought to evidence the extent of health and wellbeing initiatives available in Scottish libraries (SLIC, 2020, p.6), the deliberate omission of those not deemed 'specific', represents a failure to comprehensively capture the holistic wellbeing role of public libraries, which extends beyond targeted programmes. The findings of this study address this research gap, by evidencing the contribution of public library groups, irrespective of activity and focus, to wellbeing within disadvantaged communities. This section explores how library groups aid wellbeing by providing a mechanism of regular sustained engagement, which offer a source of enrichment and empowerment in the everyday lives of individuals.

The role of public libraries in supporting the wellbeing of individuals has been evidenced for example in terms of providing a 'therapeutic landscape' in communities where individuals, encouraged by positive perceptions of the 'familiar', 'comforting' and 'empowering' library atmosphere, can 'just go in' as opposed to using a 'specific service' (Brewster 2014, p.96-97). This study supports this aspect of the wellbeing role of the library for individuals, with participants in this study echoing this sentiment discussing the importance of public libraries as a '**haven**' and '**safety net**' comforted by the idea that '**it's just nice to know it's there**'. However, this study builds on Brewster (2014), to additionally evidence an opposing but complimentary wellbeing role enabled by the provision of scheduled activities which provide a mechanism of enabling engagement. To date the significance of regular library activities to the wellbeing of individuals is an under researched area in the LIS literature. Library groups, by providing a set purpose to attend, in addition to aiding the development of social connections through regular interaction, were demonstrated in this study as helping to make the library a place as opposed to just a space in communities.

This study evidenced the significant contribution of public library groups to wellbeing via the provision of regular scheduled activity within participants' routines. The opportunity but not obligation, to participate on a habitual basis was valued by many participants as providing a reason to '**get out of the house**', '**something to look forward**' to and as a source of '**enjoyment**'. This was particularly important to participants who were retired, on maternity

leave or unemployed who valued the structure having a group to attend brought to their routine. For some, group attendance constituted a rare, fixed part of their routine providing a **'purpose'**, with both the anticipation and experience of attending described as beneficial to their mood. Research has evidenced the benefits of regular group activity in public libraries: rhyme sessions have been found to provide 'structure' and 'something to look forward to' benefitting maternal mental health (Arts Council England, 2009, p.25), creative writing group participation, perceived as 'purposeful' amongst participants, has been found to provide 'value and meaning' for the elderly (Griffin et al., 2019, p.6) and the 'valuable stability offered by library routines' has been evidenced in knitting group participation (Robinson, 2020, p.564). This study supports and expands the findings of these studies, demonstrating these benefits in relation both to a specific single activity e.g., rhyme sessions (Arts Council England), creative writing (Griffin et al., 2019) and knitting (Robinson, 2020) and additionally across three further activities walking, adult literacy and numeracy and book groups. Demonstrating that irrespective of activity, the provision of regular group activity provides a source of purpose and routine.

Studies with a health focus have qualitatively evidenced the beneficial role of community located groups in relation to wellbeing for providing 'routine' (Horghagen et al., 2014, p.148) via participation in 'purposeful activity' (Hanson et al, 2016, p.29) which gives 'meaning' to vulnerable people with 'limited activities' in their everyday lives (Stickley et al., 2019, pp.259-263). A limitation of these studies stems from the consideration of benefit to wellbeing of one activity (creative writing/crafting/walking) on a small sample of a specific demographic such as refugees (Stickley et al., 2019) and people with mental (Horghagen et al., 2014) and/or physical health problems (Hanson et al, 2016). The findings of this study provide depth of insight, building on studies in the health sector, to evidence the important role of public libraries in aiding wellbeing for a broad demographic through the provision of regular diverse activities in disadvantaged communities.

Public library groups were found to aid wellbeing by enriching solitary activities already valued as **'cathartic'**, **'therapeutic'** and **'relaxing'**, via the addition of a social element. This study supports existing research evidencing the importance of social interaction in specific group activities such as knitting for healthy aging (Kenning, 2015), walking outdoors to

provide relaxation and reduce anxiety (Raine et al., 2017), writing as a means of catharsis, and self-expression (Bolton, 2008) and reading as a lifeline (Rothbauer & Dalmer, 2018). A strength of this study however is the ability to evidence how wellbeing benefits associated with one activity are applicable more broadly in additional activities. For example, building on the findings of Kenning (2015), participants in this study in knitting groups as well as reading, walking, literacy, and numeracy groups discussed group participation as of importance to healthy aging as a result of both the activity and accompanying social interaction as being of cognitive, emotional, or physical benefit. Whilst relaxation and a reduction in anxiety extended beyond just walking group members (Raine et al., 2017) to also include members of knitting, reading, writing and bounce and rhyme groups. Further activities such as knitting and reading, in addition to creative writing groups (Bolton, 2008) were also evidenced as providing a cathartic outlet and means of creative or verbal expression. Additionally, for many participants groups, irrespective of activity, and the library itself were regarded as providing a lifeline (Rothbauer & Dalmer, 2018) during various stages in their lives such as retirement, motherhood, ill health, and unemployment.

This study has demonstrated that public library groups have an important and varied social role which contributes to the wellbeing of members by enabling sustained social interaction. As discussed by participants across all six activities regular group attendance enabled the development of social connections amongst members, helping to create a caring and supportive environment as members bonded over shared interests and experiences. Studies in both the LIS and health literature have evidenced the importance to wellbeing of connections developed over time and the provision of peer support (e.g., Stooke & Mckenzie, 2009; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Brown Wilson et al., 2011; Horghagen et al., 2014; Shipman & McGrath, 2016). A strength of this study, in contrast to existing research, is the ability to qualitatively evidence the importance of libraries as place in this process. Participants across demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, and socio-economic status) discussed the significance of experiential factors such as the library atmosphere, available resources and staff attitudes as aiding their sustained engagement in a library group. Positive perceptions of the library as an approachable, accessible, and sociable place provided an environment conducive to fostering and facilitating the development of connections and the provision of peer support amongst group members. Further this study

supports and extends across four additional activities (Walking, Bounce and Rhyme, Creative Writing and Book Groups) Robinson's (2020, p.557-558) finding in relation to knitting groups that the provision of 'semi-curated' and 'ordinary' as opposed to targeted library programs can aid wellbeing by fostering 'understated connection and care' amongst participants.

Membership of a public library group resulted in a feeling of empowerment for many members, which extended beyond participation in the group into their everyday lives. For example, some participants who had previously suffered from anxiety and low mood mentioned increased confidence from attending a public library group **'I've started to be myself and more outgoing'**, which made it possible to **'do quite a lot of stuff now'**. For other participants recovering from or adapting to a change to their physical health (e.g., mobility, eyesight etc), the ability to continue to participate was important to their self-esteem. In addition, participants discussed feeling empowered by the ability to incorporate an activity in their routine which was not limited by either financial or family constraints. LIS studies have evidenced the importance to wellbeing of feeling empowered via independent library use to aid development amongst women (Yoshida, 2013) and the mentally ill (Brewster, 2014). In addition, the ability of regular library activities to provide boosts to self-esteem and confidence has been demonstrated for example in relation to ICT classes amongst ethnic minorities (Elbeshausen, 2007), therapeutic reading groups amongst the mentally ill (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011) and children's literacy program participation amongst mothers (Arts Council England, 2009). However, this study, builds on existing research, to provide much needed empirical evidence of how routine participation in an enjoyable activity in the local community, which was initially motivated by social, cultural, developmental or wellbeing factors, can provide a tool for empowerment.

In summary, this research expands our understanding of the holistic wellbeing role of public libraries by evidencing the wellbeing benefits enabled by the provision of routine activities. The regular nature of library groups provided a source of **'enjoyment'** and something **'to look forward to'** for participants, with the sustained nature of groups enabling members to both interact and connect with each other, creating a sociable and supportive environment. The addition of a social element to activities already perceived as of benefit to wellbeing, provided a mechanism of enriching activities and engaging people from all walks of life. This

could be appreciated in for example the opinions expressed by new mothers regarding the wide-ranging impact attending bounce and rhyme sessions had on both their own and their child's wellbeing, to retired participants discussing the issue of isolation and the purpose that group attendance brings to their lives which are no longer structured by routine. Furthermore, for some participants experiencing physical or mental health problems library groups were viewed as empowering providing a route '**back to**' what they viewed as their '**normal self**'. Within this section the ability of public library groups to enable, enrich and empower participants has been explored to empirically evidence the importance of public library groups, irrespective of activity, to wellbeing within disadvantaged communities.

## 5.4 Contribution to theory

### 5.4.1 Cultural and Social Capital

#### *5.4.1.1 Introduction*

Expanding on preceding discussion of the social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing role of public libraries, this section applies theories of cultural and social capital as a lens through which to view the ability of public library groups to bridge the cultural divide and alleviate social isolation in disadvantaged communities via building cultural and social capital. An inclusive understanding of both concepts is adopted, focusing on people and place, to provide qualitative evidence of the meaning and significance of everyday cultural participation as discussed by members of six different types of library group. Further this section explores the interplay in public library group participation between the generation of cultural and social capital to explore whether this constitutes a 'feedback loop' (Jeannotte, 2003, p.47). To date there has been limited empirical application of both concepts, individually and in combination, in the library context. This section addresses this gap contributing both to the existing evidence base in other disciplines and aiding the development of theory, providing empirically informed insight of the importance of the provision of regular group activity in connecting communities with culture and how this can extend the reach and the relevance of public libraries in 'the round' (Chatman, 1999)

#### *5.4.1.2 Cultural Capital*

Public library groups as a form of cultural participation, are representative of a shift to an increasingly 'participatory public library' (Rasmussen, 2016), which as demonstrated in this

study provide a mechanism of addressing issues of cultural divide in areas of multiple deprivations by acting as a catalyst to cultural participation and the generation of cultural capital. Cultural capital, understood as the cultural competencies that facilitate cultural participation and symbolize cultural capacity and authority (Bourdieu, 1984) highlights that inequality, particularly in disadvantaged circumstances, is multidimensional in nature extending beyond solely economic poverty to include additional social and cultural factors. Theories of cultural capital, despite dovetailing with both the purpose and practice of public libraries, have been largely absent from both theoretical discussion and empirical research exploring the cultural role of public libraries. This section addresses this gap by illuminating the role of public library groups, irrespective of activity, in aiding the generation of cultural capital by encouraging cultural participation and ultimately enabling cultural engagement.

Public library groups were found to stimulate library use both within local communities and across additional library locations. For many participants the availability of a library group, by providing a set opportunity to participate in an activity focused on an identified interest or need, encouraged and enabled library use, which otherwise held no interest. The appeal of available groups induced people into libraries located in the most deprived areas (<25% SIMD) from both the least (SIMD Data Zone 2) to the most affluent (SIMD Data Zone 6976) of surrounding areas from a broad demographic (e.g., age, gender, education, and employment status). For example, some participants with mental health concerns and the elderly, shared that they travelled outwith their local community to a library branch to participate in a group activity which was unavailable locally, whilst others revealed that as a result of group participation, they had subsequently visited a library, other than their local branch, either independently or with the help of session leaders. Low levels of cultural capital can present multiple barriers to cultural development which 'effectively chains one to a place' (Bourdieu, 1999, p.127-28) by limiting an individual's orientation toward and ability to participate in cultural activities outwith familiar class and geographical confines. These findings qualitatively evidence that the provision of varied opportunities for cultural participation are providing a catalyst within communities to connect with library services.

The availability of accessible, attractive, and inclusive library groups, irrespective of activity, were found to bring participants into public libraries who shared that they had not been



encouraged to read or use libraries as children. When viewed through the lens of cultural capital, this finding provides empirically informed insight of the role of public libraries in helping to break the cycle of a lack of childhood encouragement, which can present lifelong barriers to cultural participation (e.g., Scottish Government, 2010; Miles & Sullivan, 2012). Bourdieu (1986, p.113) believed that cultural capital could be acquired scholastically and domestically, with mothers particularly important in encouraging an interest in culture. Some participants (mothers) in this study shared a desire to ***'provide a strong foundation'*** for their children through attending a library group, perceiving libraries as an appropriate site for child development. This finding supports research evidencing that library use with children is perceived by parents as an example of 'good parenthood' (Evjen & Audunson, 2009, p.168) and extends in the library context, research evidencing that parents are motivated to take their children to cultural places to provide a beneficial 'experience (and, perhaps cultural capital)' (Brook, 2016, p.32) and the nurturing role of mothers in encouraging cultural participation (Dumais, 2002). Further this study provides qualitative insight of the long-term negative impact of the family habitus in disadvantaged circumstances on cultural development which quantitative studies like Dumais (2002) fail to consider. Evident in the finding that many participants in this study with low literacy levels who were using the library for development as an adult, experienced an absence of childhood encouragement to read for pleasure or use library services ***'I'd heard about libraries but I'd no been... go out and play, that's all I learnt'***.

As ***'just a library'*** which offered ***'just books'***, for many participants public libraries were of limited situational relevance (Chatman, 1999) perceived as having 'little or no value to their lived experience' (Chatman, 1996, p.202) in their current life circumstances (e.g., retired, unemployed, low literacy levels, economic situation). The ability of public library groups to motivate library use, demonstrates that a professional shift from 'collection to connection' (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016), as reflected in the animation of libraries via the provision of group activities, is resonating with users and extending both the reach and relevance of public libraries. This study has evidenced that the social, developmental, cultural, and wellbeing motivators discussed by participants as encouraging and enabling initial and continued participation in a public library group, correlated with the varied range of drivers and barriers to other forms of cultural

participation shared in the survey component of interviews (Section 4.4). Participants discussed factors such as interest, cost, availability, ability, family, friends, convenience, relaxation, expression, conversation, stimulation, and routine as having positively or negatively influenced both orientation and action in relation to visiting cultural places (e.g., museums), attending cultural events (e.g., concerts), participating alone (e.g., reading for pleasure) and with others (e.g., choir) in cultural activities. This finding provides empirical evidence of the ability of public libraries to stimulate cultural participation by offering cultural opportunities which mirror the wants and needs of disadvantaged communities.

This study has demonstrated that for many participants sustained participation in a public library group, by becoming a valued part of everyday life, increased not only the relevance of public libraries but also their perceived importance. In exploring participant perceptions of both the personal and community importance of public libraries, this study found that, although fairly even (28 and 27 respectively), slightly more participants stated that they felt that public libraries were personally important to them. In sharing their perceptions of the importance of public libraries both personally and within the community, participants in this study highlighted library groups as *'especially'* significant in why libraries were personally important to them. For many participants, public libraries were *'now obviously'* important to them solely because of group membership with libraries *'in general no, but this group certainly yeah'*. This finding contrasts with existing research which has evidenced that public libraries are perceived by individuals as significantly more important to communities than to them personally (Carnegie, 2017a). In 'Shining a Light' the researchers pose an interesting question in response to their finding: 'Is it that they don't recognise what a library offers as relevant to them or is it the case that the library does, in fact, have little to offer them?' (Carnegie, 2017a, p.12). This study provides empirical evidence both of the impact of a more participatory library in providing a catalyst to perception change concerning the personal importance of public libraries, and the significance of enabling cultural engagement through offering group activities to this process.

Public libraries enable 'Home-based', 'Going-out' and 'Identity-building' cultural practices (UNESCO, 2014, p.84): from the consumption of cultural products to an active participation in cultural activities and as evidenced in this study to sustained cultural engagement.

Cultural consumption, the private use of cultural objects which symbolise wider cultural tastes and preferences, and cultural participation, including both involvement in cultural activities and attendance at cultural places or events, have traditionally been regarded as constituting cultural capital (e.g., Roberts, 2004; Bennett et al., 2009). However arguably cultural engagement, understood as sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by, provides a richer indicator of cultural capital. Cultural engagement represents an 'active, purposive, and meaning-laden involvement' (Susen, 2016, p.459) with cultural practices which are 'identity building', resonating with Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and its foundational role in enabling the development of both objectified and institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Critics of Bourdieu's theoretical oeuvre have emphasised both a failure to consider the importance of the 'meaningfulness' of culture (Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun, 1993, p.33) and sufficiently address notions of 'the individual self' (Halas, 2004, p.235) by relying on quantitative research methods. This study by sensitising embodied cultural capital as cultural engagement, enables a more inclusive qualitatively informed understanding of the concept amongst individuals, to evidence the significance of people and place, rather than power (Pugh, 2011), in disadvantaged circumstances.

For many participants in this study membership of a public library group constituted a form of cultural engagement due to the significance of the group in their everyday lives. This could be attested to in the depth of sentiment shared by group participants as to what a library group meant to them. For participants with physical or mental health concerns groups were discussed with emotive language for example, for one participant currently in recovery looking to reintegrate into the local community attending a library group had '**restored**' their '**sense of self-worth**', for another participant recuperating after an accident the group had '**brought me back to my normal self**'. For elderly participants living alone groups were particularly meaningful providing '**purpose**', '**something to look forward to**' and '**company, more than anything else**'. Further amongst mothers, groups were discussed as important to their wellbeing for example for a mother with full-time caring responsibility for an adult son the group was '**something just for me**', for one new mother a library group provided '**escape**' for another '**therapy**'. Whilst some participants shared a lifelong feeling of attachment to public libraries describing them as a '**haven**' and '**safety net**' '**which I'd be**

**lost without'**, for many participants it was a library group, as opposed to using the library more broadly, which held meaning. This finding evidences the important role of library groups in enabling cultural engagement by offering opportunities for sustained cultural participation which is perceived by participants as purposeful and meaningful.

For many participants the initial catalyst to participation in a public library group was a desire for development. In research exploring cultural participation and perceptions of cultural value amongst young people Manchester & Pett (2015b, p.9) found that some young people participating in a programme at an art gallery perceived 'cultural engagement as a kind of personal development'. This resonates with the concept of embodied cultural capital which constitutes 'slow efforts to improve the mind' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.495) achieved via participation in cultural activities, active engagement with cultural objects, and efforts to develop cultural knowledge. The idea of embodying culture recognises 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, 1988, p.91). Public library groups were found to enable the embodiment of culture by providing multiple diverse and inclusive entry points to sustained cultural participation which facilitated development in the cultural context. Further this study found that positive experiences of regular library group participation, including but not limited to the opportunity for development, resulted in positive perceptions of the social (Jeannotte, 2003) and wellbeing (Kim & Kim, 2009) benefits derived from cultural participation which facilitated feelings of cultural engagement.

Public libraries have a long-standing role in enabling learning and development, originating in the enlightenment belief in the importance of cultural activities and objects for self-improvement (McMenemy, 2009) continuing to a contemporary focus on lifelong learning support and provision 'complementary' to that of the education sector (SLIC, 2015, p.17). This study has evidenced the importance of public library groups in providing an alternative site for development amongst adults with low literacy levels who had struggled in formal education (school and college), due to a range of factors such as disability and behavioural issues. For example, one participant who required a specific qualification for employment purposes shared that ***'I didn't like college so I didn't see the point in going... then I came***

***here and I got help so I like it'***. Whilst for Bourdieu (1986, p.109) institutionalised cultural capital constituted 'academically sanctioned' development in the form of educational qualifications, the concept is limited in contemporary society as it does not sufficiently account for the multiple diverse routes towards personal, social, civic and employment development afforded by lifelong learning (European Commission 2003a as cited in Eve, de Groot & Schmidt, 2007) which for many people provides a more accessible and relevant method of learning. Thompson (2012, p.191) has suggested but not evidenced the importance of 'purposeful engagement with other literate adults in a nonthreatening environment' in aiding literacy development in disadvantaged circumstances and the suitability of public libraries in providing this. This study has evidenced the important role of public library groups in providing intertwined community-based opportunities for learning and participation which enable the generation of cultural capital by encouraging sustained development in the cultural context.

Participation in a public library group was found to provide a mechanism of addressing issues of digital divide amongst both the elderly and adults with low literacy levels. Some participants shared that group attendance increased awareness, through staff encouragement and conversation with members, of opportunities for digital development providing a gateway to learning computer skills through participation in library-based computing courses. The important enabling and encouraging digital role of public libraries can be attested to in the experiences of two disabled participants in this study. One elderly participant with limited eyesight, shared that despite initially '***nervous***' participation in a library computer course '***helped me. It gave me confidence to go to... college... I've now got a kindle fire that I can read without a magnifying glass***'. Whilst another elderly participant with limited hearing, shared that they had been able to participate in a library-based computing course which they found '***fascinating***' using the internet to '***go into art galleries and all they things***', however despite encouragement from the session leader to '***go to a college to learn the computer***' felt that '***I'd like to do that but...I can't face...I'm bad enough putting myself in here let alone in a college***'. This finding builds on existing limited LIS research incorporating a Bourdieusian theoretical framework evidencing issues of digital divide in disadvantaged circumstances (Kvasny, 2006; North et al., 2008) to evidence the important role of public library groups in tackling interlinked issues of digital and cultural

divides. As evident in the illustrative examples discussed, this is achieved by providing support for, a route to, and an accessible alternative to formal education, which help to develop digital skills in disadvantaged communities, the absence of which can provide a barrier to cultural development.

Public library groups constituting both a form of reader development activity and cultural participation, were found to provide a mechanism of generating objectified cultural capital via increasing awareness of, access to and the accessibility of library collections, with an intermediary role encompassing both people and place identified in this process. 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, Goulding (2008, p.236) argues that in addition to the 'objectified cultural capital represented by their library collections' that public libraries provide individuals with the means to access collections via 'their organization and exploitation'. A cultural intermediary is understood as a person or place (Bourdieu, 1984, p.359) which through recognised expertise in a specific cultural field, has the power to mediate and influence both taste and perceptions of cultural value (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2014). The cultural intermediary concept has been applied in a diverse range of occupations such as Personal Trainers (Smith Maguire, 2008), Retro Retailers (Baker, 2012) and Walking Tour Guides (Wynn, 2012), however to date 'libraries and librarians' have been absent from discussions of cultural intermediaries (Goulding, 2008, p.236). The findings of this study contribute to this research gap by exploring participants experiences of public library intermediary practices of 'presentation' and 'representation' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.359) and the extent to which they influence book borrowing choices, providing a mechanism of enabling participants to connect with library collections and fellow users, and generate cultural capital.

Library collections are an intrinsic feature of the library as place and their significance to group participation, irrespective of activity, in providing inspiration, interest, encouragement and a catalyst to conversation has been evidenced in this study.

Participation in a public library group was found amongst participants to stimulate awareness of library collections via facilitating both 'exposure' (Peterson et al., 2012, p.15) to new titles modelled by library staff during sessions and providing the opportunity to

‘explore’ (Bamkin et al., 2013, p.50) the library and serendipitously and purposively encounter books found on shelves and as part of staff created displays during group attendance. Further participants shared the impact of staff practices such as selecting books for inclusion in library collections or activities, creating themed displays and making recommendations as influencing their book borrowing choices. For example, one participant commenting on the availability of borrowable premade bags of books at a children’s literacy group shared that *‘it made me realise that I have to take all sorts of different books’*, whilst another participant in the same group was observed by the researcher borrowing a book demonstrated by the session leader during a session. Further another participant, who regularly borrows library books, commented on library displays of new and award-winning titles *‘I find that really helpful, it saves me looking on the shelves’*. These findings empirically evidence Goulding’s (2008) suggestion that reader development activities and staff intermediary practices are important in facilitating the accessibility of, rather than just providing access to, objectified cultural capital.

In summary, this study has evidenced that public library groups provide varied and valued opportunities for cultural development and connection in communities, which address issues of cultural divide, characterised by class-based differences in cultural participation levels (e.g., Bennett et al., 2009; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012), by acting as a catalyst to cultural participation. This study provides much needed empirically informed insight of how public library groups, by both echoing the drivers towards and overcoming lifelong barriers to cultural participation, provide a mechanism of extending the reach, relevance, and importance of public libraries to become a valued part of everyday life and a source of cultural engagement in disadvantaged communities. Engagement is understood and evidenced in this study as ‘multidimensional’ including ‘cognitive, emotional and or behaviour elements’ which originate in ‘involvement’ and are actualised by feelings of ‘commitment’ (Taheri, Jafari & O’Gorman, 2014, p.321-322) derived from sustained participation. Sustained participation in a public library group, perceived by many participants as purposeful and meaningful for social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing reasons, was found to facilitate the generation of each of Bourdieu’s three expressions of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Public library groups, as evidenced in this study provide intertwined community-based opportunities for learning

and participation which encourage sustained development in the cultural context by increasing awareness of, access to, and the accessibility of library collections enabling participants to connect with library collections, resources, services, staff, and fellow users, to generate cultural capital.

#### 5.4.1.3 *Social Capital*

The social role of public libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a focus of discussion both within the field of LIS and more broadly academically, politically, and practically, with theories of social capital increasingly utilised within the LIS literature to both evidence and advocate this role (Johnson, 2015). Despite not initially intended as a primary focus of this study, during observation and interview of participants, the role of public library groups in generating social capital was a key finding. Public library groups, irrespective of activity, were found to enable interaction and foster connection within areas of multiple deprivations. This section will explore the social connections developed via public library group participation through the theoretical lens of social capital. In the absence of a consensus of definition (Johnson, 2010), social capital is understood inclusively in this study as representative of both the 'connections that bind people' (Putnam, Feldstein & Cohen, 2003, p.49) and 'the benefits of social relationships' (Johnson, 2015). This section builds on contemporary research evidencing that public libraries can serve as 'breeding grounds' (Svendsen, 2013) for the creation of social capital, focusing on the role of library groups, across a broad range of activities, locations, and participant demographics in providing a key generating mechanism for the creation of social capital in public libraries.

Public library groups as proven in this study play an important social role in the lives of participants. For many participants, a desire for socialisation provided the initial motivation to join a library group. This finding corroborates existing social capital research evidencing that public library use can be 'a deliberate, if not always conscious, strategy to engage with their fellow human beings' (Johnson & Griffis, 2009, p.188-189) which can provide 'a means to compensate for a lack of resources available through one's social network' (Johnson 2010, p.148). However, this study expands our understanding of this process by qualitatively evidencing the complex and diverse social motivators which encouraged participation in a public library group. Participants across multiple communities, encompassing a range of



activities and reflective of a broad participant demographic, shared three distinct motivations: a desire to meet others in a shared situation, with a shared interest or a shared locality. This finding helps increase our understanding of the importance of the accessible location of libraries within communities and the provision of a broad range of library groups which meet the needs and wants of residents, in motivating participation and so aiding the generation of social capital.

This study demonstrated that the varied programming available in public libraries stimulates socialisation by enabling people of all ages to interact with others in communities through local participation in a familiar shared activity. Participants discussed using a groups activity as a conduit to socialisation in the library, sharing that the opportunity for '*company*' was of most importance. Group activities have been found to be utilised as both a 'conversation starter' (McKenzie et al, 2007, p.127) and a 'tool for social facilitation' (Shipman & McGrath, 2016, p.418). The significance of 'noncore activities' (Svendsen, 2013, p.62) such as library groups in generating social capital has been evidenced by Miller (2014, p.323) who found that they provide a 'catalyst' to socialisation in public libraries, as 'unmediated contact' between library users is not common. Further through observation and in discussion with participants, this study has evidenced the importance of library groups in going beyond facilitating social interaction by enabling sustained socialisation which provides the building blocks needed to form deeper social connections and generate social capital. This finding corroborates existing research evidencing that library programs can increase the potential creation of social capital as they are successful in 'facilitating more and stronger social connections' due to the regular opportunity for interaction (Gong et al., 2008, p.74).

By incorporating different types of groups and foregrounding the library as the place where groups meet, this study evidenced the dual importance of both activity and atmosphere in enabling bonding and connection, building on existing research evidencing the role of group participation in a shared activity in facilitating bonding (e.g., Sedo, 2003; Prigoda & McKenzie 2007; Stoke & McKenzie, 2009; Pearce et al, 2016; Shipman & McGrath, 2016; MacGillivray et al, 2019). Bonding and connection were evidenced as developing amongst participants via a combination of their shared interests, experiences or locality and sustained interaction. Further the development of both a sociable and supportive

atmosphere across groups was found to enable the widespread provision of peer support amongst participants, which facilitated the generation of bonding social capital. This finding, across six types of group activity, extends our knowledge of this process in both a LIS and health context in relation to a single activity (e.g., Stooke & Mckenzie, 2009; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Brown Wilson et al., 2011; Horghagen et al., 2014; Thomson, Balaam & Hymers, 2015; Shipman & McGrath, 2016; Pearce, 2016). Further depth of insight is provided of the importance of peer support as a common feature of group participation irrespective of activity, in addition to empirically evidencing the interplay between contemporary social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing group activities and the creation of social capital in public libraries.

Social interaction during group participation, in addition to enabling the development of bonding and connection over time was also observed by the researcher and discussed by participants as providing a mechanism of generating bridging social capital via the opportunity for conversations with new people beyond their existing social network. Participants discussed both becoming aware of and utilising cafes, shops, and services within the local community as a direct result of participating in a library group either alone or with other group members. Further participants were observed by the researcher socialising after group meetings, organising additional social occasions together, sharing recommendations and invitations with fellow group members, and attending activities promoted or organised by group session leaders. The additional opportunities afforded for socialisation beyond regular participation in the group, both within the library and extending into the local community, were valued by participants as a benefit of library group membership. This finding supports and extends existing research evidencing that public library groups are 'effective in producing both 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital'. (Miller, 2014, p.323), demonstrating the multiple individual and collective benefits of the contemporary role of public libraries as meeting places within communities.

Participants shared a range of practical considerations such as cost, location and safety which influenced their decision to use the library as a suitable, desirable, or convenient place to meet new people. This finding corroborates existing social capital research which has found a link between the role of public libraries in providing a 'community meeting

place' and issues of 'availability, cost... or safety concerns' in areas of multiple deprivations (Johnson 2010, p.147- 151). In addition, this study has evidenced the significance of pre-existing positive and negative perceptions of public libraries shaped by prior experience, as providing additional drivers or barriers to socialisation via group activity in a public library. For some participants these provided a *'feeling of ease'* enabling or encouraging participation whilst others initially *'didn't think they would be allowed'* to use the library as a meeting place due to a belief rooted in childhood of libraries as silent spaces. These findings support Putnam et al's (2003) observation that both practice and perception can contribute to the creation of social capital, with using the library to meet people, participate in programs and perceiving the library as a safe place all contributory factors. Additionally, however this study has evidenced the ability of participation in a public library group to act as a catalyst to perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries, with participants in this study sharing an increased belief in the importance of public libraries for them personally and for others highlighting that *'they are better now for communities'*.

The availability of library groups brought new and encouraged lapsed users back into public libraries with the regular interaction amongst group members, with staff and library services, providing participants an opportunity to see the library as place, and also additionally a mechanism of becoming place. Varheim et al., (2008, p.889) argue that public libraries 'increase societal generalized trust' and develop social capital by becoming 'more accessible to new groups of users', additionally regular interaction with staff and users has been found to increase trust in disadvantaged communities (Griffis & Johnson, 2014). Participants in this study discussed the importance of trust in relation to group participation, with the library viewed as a trusted place for certain types of activities along with the importance of building trust amongst fellow group members to enable continued participation and progress. Trust was observed by the researcher and discussed as particularly important amongst participants who felt they had experienced stigma in other environments due to health, ability, or personal circumstances. This finding supports Varheim's (2014) research evidencing the importance of interaction in building trust amongst traditionally hard to reach individuals participating in public library programs. In particular that 'trust is clearly knowledge based', as by attending a specific program, participants gained experience and knowledge of the library, resources, other program

participants and library users which provided a causal mechanism of generating trust. (Varheim, 2014, pp.269-71).

In summary, this study contributes to a growing body of research evidencing the importance of the expansion of 'noncore activities' which have 'transformed' public libraries into 'social meeting places' (Svendsen, 2013, p.61-63) via the opportunities provided for interaction (Griffis & Johnson, 2014) which enables the generation of both bonding and bridging social capital (Miller, 2014). Providing depth of insight by encompassing six activities to evidence across groups the common features of group participation: motivation, interaction, connection, support, atmosphere, activity, perception, and trust which serve as generating mechanisms for social capital creation in public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations. The social capital created via public library groups was found to benefit participating individuals, the library service, and the wider community. For individuals group participation provided a mechanism of expanding their social network, increasing opportunities for additional socialisation, combating isolation, and fostering connection. Further both library services and their local communities benefited from the presence of a library group as evidenced in the ability of group participation to provide a catalyst to positive perception change of the contemporary relevance and importance of libraries within communities and increase awareness and usage of local places and services by library group members.

#### *5.4.1.4 'Feedback Loop'*

As evidenced public library groups provide an important mechanism of building both cultural and social capital. Further this study found that when viewed holistically, a mutually reinforcing relationship between the two concepts is evident in the everyday experience of participation in a public library group. This section explores the experiential interplay between the concepts, building on existing research evidencing the importance of opportunities for 'culture talk' (Lizardo, 2016), 'active' cultural participation with others (Jeannotte, 2003), and 'everyday' forms of local cultural activity (Miles & Gibson, 2016), to advance our understanding of this process in the library context. By viewing both cultural and social capital in conjunction with each other as opposed to in isolation, this section provides qualitative insight of the significance of the where, why and with whom of cultural participation as opposed to simply the what as typically evidenced by quantitative means.

As demonstrated in this study contemporary public libraries serve as both cultural and social hubs in disadvantaged communities, which enable the appropriation of cultural objects and encourage social interaction. The link between these two elements are dual factors of people and place, with the library as the place where groups meet purposively and serendipitously influencing conversations between people towards culture. For members of cultural groups (creative writing and book groups) sharing and discussing the written word was a key incentive for participation with some members keen to have a dedicated outlet in their routine for cultural *'expression'* and *'opinion'*. For others, a cultural interest was utilised specifically as a 'tool for social facilitation' (Shipman & McGrath, 2016, p.418), providing a mechanism of connecting with others by stimulating conversation regarding shared cultural interests and experiences. Additionally, this study found, through observation and interview, that across groups- cultural, social (walking/ knitting), and developmental (adult literacy and numeracy/ bounce and rhyme), group conversation topics included discussion of cultural products, opportunities, and places. Some conversations both during and after group activities were sparked and shaped by the environment of the library, attested to for example in one participant commenting *'Oh books we talk about because we are in the library'*. Library groups, irrespective of activity, were found to offer a routine opportunity for social interaction surrounded by cultural objects and information which provided a catalyst to share and build cultural knowledge through conversation.

In a quantitative study exploring issues of cultural divide, Lizardo (2016, pp.2-5) evidenced that 'culture talk', the ability and opportunity to deploy cultural knowledge in everyday social interaction which enables cultural capital to be 'actualized' and 'mobilized', is determined by age, social position, education level and location. By focusing on the link between sociability and stratification, Lizardo highlights that in disadvantaged circumstances people are limited in their ability to utilise cultural capital through cultural participation to connect with others and foster social capital. The findings of this study provide qualitatively informed insight of the important role of public library groups, as opposed to general library use in which 'unmediated conversation is uncommon' (Miller, 2014, p.323), in providing sites for 'culture talk' for people of all ages, abilities and socioeconomic status which helps to develop social and cultural capital. In addition, this study has evidenced the popularity of library groups amongst women over the age of 50,

suggesting that in disadvantaged communities when no longer limited by 'a choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.373), public library group participation is utilised consciously and subconsciously as a site to connect with others in the cultural context. This finding is significant as Goulding (2018, p. 518) has demonstrated that amongst the elderly there is an 'inequality of opportunity'. Whilst some elderly people are able to 'negotiate retirement' by participating in cultural activities through which cultural and social capital are acquired' (Goulding, 2018, p.537), others particularly those with low levels of education, typically have small social networks and less opportunities to deploy or develop cultural knowledge which could be used to expand these (Lizardo, 2016, Goulding, 2018).

In evidencing the importance of a sociable atmosphere in group based cultural participation in helping to build social and cultural capital, this study supports and extends existing research exploring links between the two concepts. Most notably Jeannotte (2003, p.36-38) who by drawing on Bourdieu's (1986, p.249) argument that the volume of cultural capital possessed by others within an individual's social network can act as 'a multiplier effect' to their own and Putnam's (2000, p.411) claim that 'social capital is often a valuable by-product of cultural activities', evidences the 'collective benefits' which arise from cultural participation. Utilising Canadian survey data, Jeannotte (2003, p.45-46) evidences the significance of both 'quantity' and 'quality' of cultural consumption and participation demonstrating the particular importance of 'active' cultural participation in groups in creating a 'feedback loop' between social and cultural capital. Further akin to Chatman's theory of 'life in the round' (1999) and Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', Jeannotte (2003, p.47) finds a collective impact from cultural participation, with benefit extending beyond the individual to communities as 'shared norms of behaviour' are developed. The findings of this study by utilising qualitative as opposed to quantitative data, both support and expand on Jeannotte's study providing depth of insight of the lived experience of active cultural participation with others, evidencing the contemporary interplay between quantity and quality enabled by sustained library group participation. Further this study has evidenced the ability of library groups to connect both neighbours and strangers in communities, enabling routine cultural participation to become the norm with many participants sharing that over a number of years they had not/would not miss attending a group session.

This study evidenced that participating in a public library group was perceived as meaningful by participants because they felt that the group brought something to their everyday lives. Across six different types of group, shared experiences of participation were identified revealing that library groups, irrespective of activity, were valued for providing scheduled opportunities for: interaction and interest, connection and creativity, development and distraction, enjoyment and escape, purpose and pleasure. Positive perceptions of these aspects of participation and their significance to everyday routines, which were shaped by personal circumstances rather than determined by demographic, enabled and encouraged sustained cultural engagement. The availability of accessible and appealing opportunities provided a mechanism of influencing orientation towards cultural participation, both encouraging existing library users to try something new in addition to bringing non and lapsed users into libraries, mostly locally but also elsewhere in the city. Each of the 9 branches included as research sites in this study were located in areas of multiple deprivations with significant variety in style of library buildings, community usage, available facilities, and proximity to surrounding area resources. However, these place factors were not discussed by participants as constraining or encouraging cultural participation, rather specifically the availability of a library group provided the driver to using a public library. Library groups, by providing temporally created sites for community based cultural participation, were found to animate library spaces increasing their accessibility by connecting people and place in the cultural context.

The ethos, aims and findings of this study, which has advocated and adopted a more inclusive understanding of culture to explore and evidence the contemporary public library role in generating both cultural and social capital, compliments and connects with the recent Understanding Everyday Participation- Articulating Cultural Values (UEP) project. UEP, holistically explores the links between participation, people, and place, focusing on what local everyday cultural participation means to people and the 'significance of... routines, activities and interactions' in 'how cultural and social capital is produced and mobilised contextually through participation' (Miles & Gibson, 2016, p.152). UEP research evidences the significance of the 'freedom from necessity' embodied in life stages such as retirement (Miles, 2016, p.187) and the desire to give children beneficial experiences (Brook, 2016, p.32) as motivating local cultural participation, this study corroborates both

these findings providing evidence of this in the library context. Further in qualitatively informed discussions of 'the values people attach to' everyday cultural participation (Miles & Gibson, 2016, p.151-152), the UEP project whilst not specifically exploring a distinction between cultural participation and engagement, with both terms used interchangeably, does argue that 'a far more committed sense of engagement is often expressed in discussions of everyday forms of participation' (Miles, 2016, p.185) which provide sustained sites for the development of various skills and social networks. The findings of this study expand on this to evidence the significance of regular and routine participation in generating deeper feelings of engagement with a specific activity, place and/or group of people and the social, cultural, wellbeing, development benefits derived from this.

UEP research has foregrounded place both at an area/neighbourhood level, evidencing both that where people live can provide 'opportunity structures' (Brook, 2016, p.31) for participation and that participation is as a 'situated process' (Miles & Gibson, 2017, p.1) at a specific place, such as public libraries where the importance of 'pull' factors such as trip chaining have been demonstrated (Delrieu & Gibson, 2017, p.19). The findings of this study build on these discussions of place to evidence that library groups, as structured opportunities for sustained cultural participation, serve as a pull factor for public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations. Further Miles (2016, p.189) argues that 'Places then are not merely geographical backdrops to or neutral containers of participation but are, in Bourdieu's terms, sociocultural force fields in their own right'. With places, both at a collective community and individual venue level having the power to constrain or facilitate cultural participation. This study has evidenced the significance of public libraries as community based cultural institutions, as demonstrated in participants sharing examples of using a local library at different stages of their lives such as in childhood, to study, relax, for work and with relatives young and old. In addition, library groups, by encouraging sustained cultural engagement, were found to provide a mechanism of enabling the library to become a third place for participants, with the group providing a safe, stimulating, and sociable opportunity to enjoy culture and connection.

In summary, this section has evidenced that the traditional cultural purpose of public libraries and an increasingly contemporary social practice are not polar opposites, instead as



demonstrated in the lived experience of everyday public library group participation, these roles are intertwined, serendipitously and purposively working in tandem to build both cultural and social capital. The routine opportunity for 'active' cultural participation with others was found to provide a 'feedback loop' (Jeannotte, 2003, p.47) between the social and cultural by offering opportunities for both connection and development sparked, shaped, and sustained by activity and atmosphere. The library as the place where the group was held was foundational to this process, providing a catalyst to 'culture talk' (Lizardo, 2016) which was valued both intellectually and instrumentally for providing a conduit to social interaction. The sociocultural nature of public library groups was found to enable them to **'actually become much more than just the purpose it was set up for... it offers much more'**, evident in many participants sharing that whilst they had been motivated to join initially for one reason, they continued to participate for unintended and unexpected social, cultural, wellbeing and development reasons perceived as beneficial or meaningful.

#### 5.4.1.5 Conclusion

This study has evidenced that public library groups provide a key generating mechanism for the development of both cultural and social capital, individually and in tandem as part of a 'feedback loop' (Jeannotte, 2003, p.47). Public library groups, were found to be key in bridging the cultural divide by providing a catalyst to library use, helping to overcome long-term barriers such as a lack of childhood encouragement, low literacy levels and perceptions of limited relevance. Further, positive experiences of participation as shared by participants, were imbued with meaning and purpose, evidencing that for many this constituted a source of cultural engagement in everyday routines. Feeling engaged encouraged sustained participation and so aided the generation of cultural capital, stimulating development in the cultural context by increasing awareness of and interaction with cultural products.

Sustained participation was also found in this study to be important in generating social capital with library groups providing a valued and for some vital routine opportunity for socialisation, enabling people of all ages to interact regularly with others in communities through local participation in a familiar shared activity. Regular interaction amongst library group participants, built trust, strengthened connections, and facilitated the giving and receiving of peer support, encouraging the development of both bonding and bridging social capital. Further this study empirically evidenced the everyday interplay between the social

and the cultural role of public libraries, how public library groups rather than just representative of a shift in practice from 'collection to connection' (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016), facilitate the development of cultural and social capital, by utilising collections as a conduit to connection.

## 5.4.2 Third Place and Information Grounds

### *5.4.2.1 Introduction*

In exploring the role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities, a theme which emerged from the data across the social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing aspects of this role, was the importance of the library as place. A place, as opposed to a space, connotes intrinsic characteristics or qualities which constitute a form of attachment. Participant responses in this study revealed feelings of trust, comfort and familiarity resulting from participation in a public library group, evidencing that libraries are appreciated as more than a space in communities, providing a valued place to go locally. To date there has been no research which evidences the significance of public library groups to the wider discussion of libraries and place. This study provides a much-needed contribution in this area, building on limited existing theoretical and empirical exploration of place in the LIS literature focusing on two linked concepts: third place (Oldenburg, 1999) and information grounds (Pettigrew, 1999) to provide empirical insight into the unique role of public library groups in fostering a sense of place amongst library group members.

### *5.4.2.2 Third Place*

In discussing their motivations for, experience of, and reasons for continued participation in a library group, participant responses in this study demonstrated that library groups functioned as a 'third place' for many members. Oldenburg (1999, p.42) outlined eight third place characteristics which encapsulate the 'home away from home' feeling which certain places distinct from the home and workplace can evoke. Collectively library groups were valued by members as a result of each of the eight third place characteristics they demonstrated such as: they were inherently social in nature (8); for the familiar faces that attended (6); they encouraged a sense of fun and camaraderie amongst members (7); the inclusive and accommodating atmosphere (2); feeling at home in the library (3); attendance was flexible (5), groups were open to everyone (1) and community based venues were easily

accessible due to the absence of cost and traveling barriers (4). As with other types of libraries evidenced as third places such as academic libraries (Montgomery & Miller, 2011) and school libraries (Kuno, 2011), library groups in disadvantaged communities enhance the ability of libraries to function as place for members because they encompass aspects of participation relating to approachability, accessibility, and sociability.

A third place should be approachable with Oldenburg (1999, pp.24-42) stressing that they should function as a 'leveller' (1), 'maintain a low profile' (2) and make people feel at ease by providing a 'home away from home' (3). A place characteristic commonly associated with public libraries is their universality, with this study evidencing that participants specifically joined a group in a library as they felt they would fit in. For example, one recently retired participant decided to join after seeing a picture of group members in a newspaper and being reassured as **'they were just like me'**. Whilst another participant mentioned previously leaving a group running in another venue as **'they were all very arty-farty....and they weren't my kinda people'**, however joined a library group offering the same activity and has been attending regularly for a few years. Further participants discussed feeling at **'ease'** amongst other members and not **'inhibited to talk'** as **'everybody's the same'**. Participants also discussed feeling **'comfortable'** in the library, as a result of the **'lovely'** staff who made them feel **'welcome'** and the **'nice atmosphere'** during groups which made them feel they had **'the freedom of the place if we wish'**. Many participants highlighted a perceived contrast between the current **'open', 'warm', 'encouraging'** and **'sociable'** library atmosphere, to that of their youth where **'you felt you were imposing on a space that really was to be silent and not shared'**.

Accessibility was also vital to the success of a third place with Oldenburg (1999, pp.22-32) arguing they should be easy to access (4) and free from obligation (5). A distinct place characteristic of public libraries is their ease of accessibility as they are free to use and located within communities, removing barriers to access such as cost and travel. This study has evidenced the importance of the financial and physical accessibility of the library to group members. For example, one participant who was looking to join a group mentioned purposively looking for a place where cost was not a barrier as they **'didn't want one that I had to think oh I needed money to go there'**. For other participants for with physical or

mental health conditions or practical considerations such as childcare commitments were a factor, the library being *'local'* was important. For example, the *'handy'* location of the library *'across the road'* made membership possible for one retired participant with their spouse able to help with childcare whilst the group met *'win win, he comes over and watches my grandson whilst I come to this'*. The ease of access aided regular attendance as despite viewing the groups as *'flexible'*, with no set requirement to attend, most participants influenced by enjoyment as opposed to obligation choose to attend a group *'pretty much every time it's on'*.

Sociability is however arguably the key aspect of a third place for Oldenburg (1999, pp.26-38) characterised by the presence of 'regulars' (6), a 'playful' mood (7) and with 'conversation' as 'the main activity' (8). Whilst these attributes are perhaps those less likely to be associated with stereotypical notions of the silent library, they typify how groups can and do animate public libraries. This study has evidenced that the opportunity afforded to engage with others in enjoyable sustained social interaction was valued as both a motivation to join and a benefit of membership of a library group. Participants found sessions *'enjoyable'* which encouraged continued attendance, with groups consisting of mainly regular attendees in addition to infrequent and new members. Continued attendance enabled different levels of connection to develop between members, which were highlighted by participants during interview and observed by the researcher during sessions. Many participants discussed initially joining a library group as they were looking for *'company'* and *'conversation'*. Conversation within groups was not limited to the group activity and the ability to *'chat about a lot of other things'* helped foster *'a sense of camaraderie'* generated by *'all the patter'* and *'wee stories'* shared between members.

In addition, as observed by the researcher during group sessions and highlighted by members during interview, the intrinsically social nature of all the groups facilitated the sharing and receiving of information both serendipitously and purposively during conversation. Topics discussed amongst group members, library staff and group facilitators, varied from session to session- with common topics focusing on personal matters such as health, family, and hobbies, in addition to everyday public matters such as the news, goings on in the local community and shared interests. Participants discussed purposively sharing

information ***'we pass on information even the bargains in the shops we pass that on'***, mainly to ***'introduce people to things'*** when they thought other members ***'would have been interested'***. In addition, this study evidenced that the library as the place where the group was held serendipitously influenced conversation topics, as participants encountered displays, leaflets and posters, leading participants to discuss ***'have you seen this is going on or that going on'***. Participants highlighted that a benefit of library group membership was that their awareness of both library services and wider cultural opportunities had increased, through conversation with other members and staff, as opposed to solely via traditional targeted library approaches to providing information such as via advertising.

This study additionally evidenced that for some participants, outwith attending a library group the library is perceived and valued as place. Participants discussed public libraries as providing a trusted place to go within their communities which is regarded as both a ***'haven'*** and a ***'safety net'***. For some participants it was important just ***'knowing you can go there'***. For example, for one new mother, who had initially suffered from anxiety in leaving the house with her child, the library provided not only a place she felt safe taking her child but also where the child felt safe ***'It's the one place that I know [my child] feels safe to go... so I always know there's a place if it's a rainy day and we don't want to be stuck in the house'***. Whilst for elderly participants having a ***'friendly'*** place to go locally where they could ***'communicate with humans'***, take their time using technology and feel part of the local community was important as staff in a lot of other places ***'don't have time for old people'***.

Oldenburg omitted libraries from both his initial (Oldenburg, 1999) and expanded (Oldenburg, 2001) discussion of third places, which whilst reflective of libraries at that point in time, arguably given the subsequent shift from 'collection to connection' (Danish Agency for Libraries and Media, 2010 as cited in Rasmussen, 2016) in library practice discussed above across all eight third place characteristics warrants reconsideration. Harris (2007, p.150-151) for example argued more than a decade ago that public libraries were perfectly placed 'to become the next great good third place', suggesting this could be achieved through creating a more sociable environment via the provision of cafe facilities and groups and activities. To date there has been limited LIS research which focuses on the significance of group activity in public libraries in relation to theories of third place (Griffin et al., 2019).

This study addresses this gap by building on limited empirical research exploring theories of third place in central libraries (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002; Fisher, Saxton, Edwards & Mai, 2007b), branch libraries (Putnam et al., 2003), at the neighbourhood level in disadvantaged communities (Hickman, 2013) as digital and physical places (Houghton, Foth & Miller, 2013) and in relation to creative writing groups (Griffin et al., 2019), to empirically evidence the ability of public library groups, irrespective of activity, to serve as a third place.

In the first of only a small number of LIS studies to empirically apply the concept Leckie & Hopkins (2002, p.359), in a major mixed methods study focusing on the role of two large Canadian central libraries as urban public spaces, argue that 'the empirical data demonstrate quite clearly that these libraries fulfil Oldenburg's criteria for a successful public place'. The authors assert (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002, pp.333-341) in their findings that this can be evidenced in the 'intent, design, and operation of these libraries', however these attributes whilst illustrative more broadly of the role of modern central libraries as a 'successful public place' in Toronto and Vancouver, do not represent these libraries as a third place. For example, two of Oldenburg's criteria state that a third place should both have a low profile and be easily accessible, however the 'eye catcher' architectural design of both buildings and the poor public transport links and 'isolated from the city center' location of one of the buildings evidently are at odds with the essence of Oldenburg's concept which has been misappropriated by this study (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002, pp.339).

Following on from the above study, Fisher et al (2007b) also applied Oldenburg's concept to a newly opened innovatively designed central library. In the large study, interviewing over 200 users and passers-by of Seattle Public Library Fisher et al (2007b, p.152-153) evidenced 3 out of 8 propositions encompassing approachability characteristics only, finding that participants thought of the library as neutral (1), providing a leveller (2) and a home away from home (3). However, the authors themselves admitted that the framework would be better applied to a branch library due to the 'smaller scale and tighter cohesiveness' which could 'more fully reflect the attributes of a third place'. The suitability of the concept to branch libraries can be appreciated in Putnam et al's (2003) qualitative study of the creation of social capital in branch libraries in Chicago. Whilst evidencing the branches as a third place was not the key focus, the study demonstrated that branch libraries are accessible,

provide opportunity for conversation and have regulars concluding that whilst a 'branch library shares many third- place characteristics' they are 'not as purely a social place' being 'more purposeful than the ideal third place' (Putnam et al., 2003, pp.50-51).

Subsequently three contemporary studies have evidenced how purposeful activity can stimulate social interaction and enable public libraries to better function as a third place. In a large qualitative study exploring links between poverty and place in disadvantaged British communities, Hickman (2013) comprehensively evidenced that at the neighbourhood infrastructure level third places, including libraries, were valued by residents both as a medium for local social interaction and their functional role in providing other services. In addition, finding that in disadvantaged communities local third places were particularly important to residents who had childcare or health considerations, were retired or unemployed, with barriers to usage of local third places evidenced as confidence, mobility, and safety (Hickman 2013, p.229-231). The findings of this study both corroborate and build on those of Hickman to evidence that public library groups provide a mechanism of overcoming barriers to engagement in disadvantaged communities, with participants highlighting that the library as the place where the group was held helped them to overcome each of these barriers. Further as demonstrated by the demographic mainly attending local library groups in this study- the elderly, unemployed, parents and those with both physical and mental health conditions, the ability to overcome these barriers enables public library groups to function as third place for the people who need them most.

In a qualitative study exploring the impact of participation in a public library creative writing group in combating social isolation amongst the elderly, Griffin et al., (2019) demonstrated the significance of the library providing a third place for participants. The authors evidenced the importance of 'providing opportunities to engage in meaningful social connection and activities', finding that elderly participants were motivated to participate in group activity due to a pre-existing positive relationship with the library and to expand their social network (Griffin et al., 2019, p.15). This study corroborates these findings evidencing a desire for socialisation and the library as the place where groups are held as motivating participation amongst existing users, whilst also finding that the provision of group activity helps the library to become a third place for participants with limited/no history of library

use. Further the authors suggest their findings could be extended beyond creative writing to additional activities as 'Library programming, regardless of type, tends to share number of common characteristics: having the capacity for learning, for connection, for both solitary and shared practice, welcoming to newcomers/beginners, and having no financial barriers to participation'. (Griffin et al., 2019, p.16). The findings of this study including both creative writing and five additional activities empirically evidences the hypothesis of Griffin et al., (2019) as to the shared motivations and meanings of group participation in public libraries.

In a large case study of how libraries build community links both physically and digitally in an urban library branch in Australia, Houghton et al (2013, p.36) found that the library as a physical place helped to foster 'stronger social connections' than were achieved digitally. Arguably the focus of the study is on the library's role externally as a hub within the community as opposed to internally as a third place in the lives of users. However, the study does evidence the impact that a range of purposeful activities available in the physical space such as a knitting group, have both in stimulating social interaction and extending community networks beyond the physical space of the building through the sharing of information regarding other local opportunities for participation. Whilst the findings of this study corroborate those of Houghton et al (2013) in relation to knitting groups, by encompassing 5 additional types of library group significantly build on these, by empirically evidencing more broadly how public library groups irrespective of activity strengthen social connections and facilitate the sharing of information of local activities, places, and services. In addition, this study provides further depth of insight regarding the social sharing of information enabled by purposeful activities, by viewing these through the theoretical lens of information grounds (Pettigrew, 1999), with the failure of Houghton et al (2013) to do so arguably representing a limitation in their study.

#### *5.4.2.3 Information Grounds*

Studies, utilising Fisher's theory of information grounds (Pettigrew, 1999) have evidenced the important reciprocal links between participation in library activities, fostering a social atmosphere, the sharing of information and the library as place. Library activities such as groups, given that they are temporally created in a library, have a focused activity, attract people from all walks of life and are inherently social in nature provide rich sites to explore



the concept of information grounds. To date studies utilising the concept whilst collectively contributing to the process of information ground theory building (Fisher et al, 2007a) have largely been in isolation focusing on one or two activities, rather than more broadly as to how public library groups function as both information ground and third place. This study builds on existing information ground research empirically exploring three types of library groups comparable with those included in this research: immigrant literacy programmes (Fisher et al, 2004), children's story times (Stooke & McKenzie, 2009) and knitting groups (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007) to evidence common aspects of experience across three additional types of library group activity: walking, creative writing and reading groups. Providing much needed empirically informed insight as to how library groups irrespective of activity, function as information grounds as a result of both their third-place characteristics and the library as place where the group is held.

In a qualitative study of an US public library literacy and coping skills program for immigrants Fisher et al (2004, p.762) found that the program provided additional benefits, to those anticipated, by functioning as an information ground which provided a 'multiplier effect', evidencing the importance of contextual factors such as participant demographic, place, and the role of staff as intermediaries in this process. The findings of this study contribute to the above research area, by evidencing that library groups function as information grounds for a range of participant demographics at transitional stages in their lives such as motherhood, unemployment, or retirement where relevant information is useful. Through participation in a group, members encountered and obtained information within the library via displays, leaflets, and internet access, in addition to from both staff and fellow group members in the role of intermediaries. Further this study in response to a recognised research gap highlighted in the above study (Fisher et al., 2004, p.764) provides evidence of how library groups additionally serendipitously and purposively serve as inverted information grounds for library services through the intermediary role of libraries in promoting cultural objects, activities and places and group members encountering and sharing this information to interact socially.

In a qualitative study involving members of baby story time and knitting groups meeting in a public library, McKenzie et al (2007) evidenced that forming social connections through

purposive activity and the sharing of information enabled public libraries to function as a place for women. The study found a desire for 'social' interaction and 'help' motivated initial membership in groups, whilst positive experiences of 'fellowship' and 'support' encouraged continued participation (McKenzie et al., 2007, p130). Additionally, knitting and children's activities were evidenced as providing opportunities for caring behaviour, which helped women legitimate devoting time to the activity. This study substantiates and builds on each of these findings to evidence that groups help libraries to function as a place for women by providing routine opportunities for acts of self-care. Group activities were discussed by participants as '*just for me*' providing a welcome '*escape*' from the '*obligations*' of their domestic routine which some found left them feeling '*demented*'. Female participants of all ages valued the opportunity for a set activity separate from family life, where they could regularly join with other people in a shared interest, encouraging the sharing of stories and information, and enabling relationships to develop.

Place related factors are important in both establishing and enabling the permanence of information grounds which are characterised by a 'people-place-information trichotomy'. Fisher et al (2007a) in a large mixed methods of information grounds on college campuses, evidenced 6 key place characteristics which were valued by students in an information ground: focal activities (A), conviviality (B) creature comforts (C) location and permanence (D) privacy (E) and ambient noise (F). A library group, by its very nature incorporates a set activity (A), to demonstrate the range of activities available in contemporary public libraries six diverse types have been included in this study. Further participants highlighted the benefits of the variable layouts in library buildings during groups, with some participants valuing the privacy of a private room or quiet area (E), whilst others enjoyed being in the library environment observing other patrons also using the space for different purposes (F) In addition, this study evidenced that information ground characteristics B, C & D can be understood as directly correlating with those of third place characteristics of library groups discussed earlier relating to approachability (1 & 3), accessibility (4) and sociability (6, 7 & 8). As a result, this study has demonstrated that public library groups meet each of the place characteristics considered optimal in an information ground.

#### 5.4.2.4 Conclusion

Preceding discussions concerning the contemporary role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities, provides much needed empirical evidence of how the library functions as a place. Fisher et al (2007b, p.135) argued that place as a theoretical concept provides a useful tool in understanding the 'multifaceted dimensions' of library use and perception. The findings of this study enrich discussions of library as place, concurring with those of Oliphant (2014, p.356) who argued, that public libraries are now perceived and utilised within communities as 'safe' places for both 'socializing' and 'relaxation'. This study provides much needed depth of insight by evidencing the role that the availability of opportunities for sustained participation such as public library groups, irrespective of activity, have in enabling this process. Atmospheric factors encouraged and enabled participation and were important in ensuring the library became more than just a space in communities, but rather a place or where users felt comfortable. In addition, the important role of libraries in enabling the social sharing of information and how this helped to 'develop and sustain a sense of place' (Williamson & Roberts, 2010, p.285) within local communities has been evidenced. In summary this study has demonstrated that the success of library groups, are influenced by both their third place and information ground characteristics, highlighting the importance of the library as place.

## 5.5 Conclusion

### Groups

This section evidenced the motivations and meaning associated with participation in six different types of public library groups. Beginning with knitting groups evidence was presented of why participants knit, knitting as a shared activity which encourages and enables socialisation, how this socialisation aids both development and wellbeing and how knitting groups are helping to change perceptions of public libraries. Next walking groups focused on the library as a practical facilitator for walking groups, the impact on the health and wellbeing of participants, and the importance of having the group to go to on a regular basis. Third bounce and rhyme groups evidenced the developmental and social benefits of participation and the impact of the group on the wellbeing of mothers. Fourth adult literacy and numeracy groups evidenced the motivations behind participation, the atmosphere being conducive to learning, the application of skills in day-to-day life and the significance of

having the group to go to on a regular basis. Fifth creative writing groups demonstrated the importance of writing as both a solitary and shared activity, the benefits to development and wellbeing derived from group activity and the facilitative role of public libraries. Finally book groups evidenced what reading means to participants, why they were motivated to join a book group, the experience of attending and the perceived benefits to wellbeing.

### **Shared Themes**

Participant interview responses from six types of library group, regarding initial motivation, meaning, and benefits of membership highlighted shared aspects of participation which provided empirically informed insight into the role of public libraries within areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow in four key areas: social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing. First, the social section evidenced the key social role of public library groups, irrespective of activity, in encouraging connection, combating isolation, and providing a catalyst to positive perception change of the social value of public libraries in disadvantaged communities. Second, the developmental section demonstrated the importance of public library groups to both literacy development and lifelong learning, achieved by enabling participants to learn new skills and improve existing ones in areas of both personal and professional interest and need. Third, the cultural section evidenced the contribution of library groups, understood irrespective of activity as a form of cultural participation, in relation to the contemporary cultural role of public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations. Fourth, the wellbeing section demonstrated how library groups aid wellbeing through regular sustained engagement, which provided a source of enrichment and empowerment in the everyday lives of individuals.

### **Contribution to Theory**

This section placed earlier discussion of the meaning and motivation associated with individual group activities and the collective impact on the role of the library, in the wider context of theory to discuss the implications of the findings of this study more broadly in relation to theories of cultural and social capital, third place and information grounds. Firstly, an inclusive understanding of theories of social and cultural capital was adopted separately and then subsequently in tandem to highlight the contribution of library groups to the public library role in aiding cultural divide and social inclusion. Secondly, theories of third place and information grounds were applied to discuss the significance of library

groups to the wider discussion of libraries and place. This section, through the application of four related theories in the library context, provided depth of insight and a holistic understanding of the interplay between participation, people, and place in public library groups.

### **Holistic Contribution**

This research investigated the barriers & drivers to cultural participation & the contribution of public library groups to addressing issues of cultural divide. In demonstrating the interplay between participation, people, and place, this research evidenced the significance of participatory group activity in helping to overcome barriers to and provide a driver for cultural participation. Empirical insight was provided of how group activity for providing enriching and empowering everyday social, cultural, development or wellbeing benefits. Building on this, how public libraries build cultural capital via stimulating and strengthening social connection through group activity was examined. A holistic relationship was demonstrated between cultural and social capital generation, with dual factors of people and place identified as fostering and facilitating cultural development and social connection. Library groups, via an important combination of activity and atmosphere, were found to function as 'a third place' to enjoy culture and connection which encouraged socialisation whilst both animating library spaces and increasing their accessibility. A further objective was to better understand how public libraries can demonstrate impact and advocate value by enabling and encouraging cultural engagement. Empirical insight was provided of how public libraries fostered cultural engagement by facilitating sustained cultural participation in areas of interest and need which was perceived by participants as purposeful and meaningful. Group participation increased the reach and relevance of public libraries amongst existing users and previous non-users, raised awareness of available services and provided a catalyst to positive perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

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## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Research Questions**

To best convey depth of insight across the three research questions investigated, findings were presented by research method (4.2, 4.3, 4.4) and then discussed hierarchically starting with individual groups (5.2), shared themes identified (5.3) and collective implications for theory (5.4). This section concludes this study by holistically discussing key findings directly in response to each research question:

#### **6.1.1 Research Question 1**

**What are the key drivers and barriers to cultural participation within areas of multiple deprivations and which public library activities and resources could be best utilised to address issues of cultural divide?**

After examining relevant literature from across multiple disciplines, the researcher identified that cultural participation levels are typically positively (driver) or negatively (barrier) influenced by education, environment, employment, ethnicity, and encouragement. This study found that education provided a driver with library groups utilised to aid development by adults with low literacy levels who had struggled in school and/or college due to a range of factors such as disability and behavioural issues, with groups providing support for, a route to, and an accessible alternative to formal education. Environment was evidenced as enabling and encouraging participation, with the availability of group activity locally important due to practical considerations such as mobility, convenience, and caring commitments and a desire to connect with others or utilise areas of specific interest in the local community. Employment additionally was discussed as a factor in participation in relation to orientation, to perform better at or find work and opportunity, with a lack of free time due to work schedules providing a barrier whilst retirement provided a catalyst.

This study evidenced the significance of encouragement during childhood, predominantly by mothers, to adult cultural participation. Many elderly participants with positive childhood experiences of using library services developed a habit of lifelong library use and reading for pleasure, which was encouraged in their own children and grandchildren. Further this study evidenced that new mothers enabled and encouraged library use amongst their children as

they perceived public libraries as places appropriate for and conducive to child development, in addition to places of benefit to adult and child wellbeing. Conversely the absence of parental encouragement or early library use, was found to have a negative impact on both reading for pleasure and library use amongst some participants with this most noticeable amongst, but not limited to, members of adult literacy and numeracy groups. The availability of accessible, attractive, and inclusive library groups, irrespective of activity, were found to break the cycle of a lack of childhood encouragement, bringing adult participants into public libraries who had not been encouraged to read or use libraries as children. Further participation in public library groups by ethnic groups, although limited in this study, was found to be influenced by education, environment, employment, and encouragement factors, which motivated participation in developmental as opposed to social or cultural groups.

Barriers and drivers to cultural participation were qualitatively evidenced as being complex and multifaceted, incorporating and extending beyond those initially identified in the literature review. This study identified additional shared practical and affective barriers to cultural participation which manifested, irrespective of group activity, at an individual level in response to specific life circumstances, as opposed to predetermined by a specific demographic. Health was evidenced as a barrier experienced by a broad demographic with long and short term mental and physical conditions such as injury, illness, pregnancy, addiction, and disability. Caring responsibilities (children/ grandchildren and elderly parents) provided both a barrier and a driver for participants both retired and of working age. Confidence, particularly participating in group activity alone, was found to provide a barrier to participation for women of different ages and economic situations. Perceptions of approachability of certain venues and activities, specifically a fear of not fitting in along with issues of accessibility, specifically in relation to cost and location of activities, were evidenced as providing barriers to participation. The availability of free, convenient, varied group activity in a familiar, local community venue helped overcome these diverse barriers and so enable and encourage participation.

This study identified additional social, cultural, developmental, wellbeing and practical drivers to cultural participation in areas of multiple deprivations. Social motivations



represented a desire to expand social networks to meet other people in a shared situation, with a shared interest or a shared locality. Developmental motivations revealed an aspiration for personal and professional progression in areas of both want and need, including adult and child literacy development and improvement in a specific skill/area of interest. Cultural motivations reflected an interest in core library activities and resources such as reading. Wellbeing motivations related an aim to improve quality of life through routine activity which would aid either physical or mental wellbeing, by improving mobility and reducing feelings of isolation, anxiety, or low mood. In addition, for some participants practical considerations such as cost, location, and convenience (e.g., timing/activity) of groups were also a facilitative factor in motivating participation without which they otherwise would not have thought of joining a group.

This study demonstrated that a perception of having benefited from participation provided a driver to continued participation. Participant perceptions of the social benefits of library groups revealed groups were valued for their ability to facilitate social connection as opposed to solely social interaction with the opportunity for sustained socialisation alleviating feelings of isolation by enabling connection and encouraging bonding. Library groups were regarded as beneficial to both literacy development and lifelong learning, with the environment and atmosphere of the library found to be conducive to development. Key was the provision of an accessible alternative to formal education amongst adults with low literacy levels, a supportive and sociable environment for child development and motivation and encouragement to persevere and progress with varied interests. Library groups were regarded as of benefit culturally as they provided an opportunity to connect with, increase awareness and understanding of library collections, in addition to providing valued opportunities for expression, creativity and enjoyment in varied cultural activities. Participants viewed library groups as of benefit to their wellbeing as they provided a purposeful and meaningful opportunity for empowerment, enrichment, and enjoyment within everyday routines. Further practical considerations which provided the initial opportunity to participate for some participants, facilitated continued attendance with the ease of access, lack of obligation, and relaxed atmosphere found by the researcher to be important in this process.

This study evidenced that the availability of opportunities for cultural participation provided a catalyst to connect with library services and utilise resources. The appeal of available groups induced people into libraries located in the most deprived areas (<25% SIMD) from both the least (SIMD Data Zone 2) to the most affluent (SIMD Data Zone 6976) of surrounding areas from a broad demographic (e.g., age, gender, education, and employment status). Library groups were identified as having an important role in bringing lapsed users back to and drawing non-users into public libraries, by providing a set opportunity to participate in an activity focused on an identified interest or need, stimulated library use, which otherwise held no interest. Library groups, as a form of both cultural participation and reader development activity, increased awareness of, access to and the accessibility of library collections, with an intermediary role encompassing people and place evidenced. Library collections were utilised for inspiration and interest in cultural groups, as a source of encouragement to developmental groups and a conduit to conversation within social groups. Further book choices were found to be influenced by library intermediary practices with group attendance facilitating exposure to new titles modelled by library staff during sessions and the encountering of books found on shelves and as part of staff created displays during exploration of the library.

The researcher found that public library groups were additionally effective in addressing issues of cultural divide as participation, irrespective of activity, enabled many participants to develop an increased awareness of opportunities for wider cultural participation beyond the group. Routine participation facilitated both the encountering and sharing of information. Regularly visiting the library to attend a group helped participants keep up to date both with available library activities and events, in addition to opportunities for cultural participation beyond the library via leaflets, posters and staff recommendation and promotion. Library groups functioned as information grounds with the social sharing of information, serendipitously and purposively within groups, increasing awareness of opportunities for cultural participation. Group conversations were not limited to the group activity, with conversations influenced by environment, atmosphere and activity leading to spontaneous discussion of culture. Further sustained interaction led participants to become aware of each other's tastes, encouraging the sharing of information perceived as of relevance and possible interest.

#### *6.1.1.1 Research Question 1: Original Contribution*

This study demonstrated the significance of offering opportunities for participatory group activity in public libraries in areas of multiple deprivations in addressing issues of cultural divide, generating the first empirical evidence in this area. Depth of insight in the library context was generated of the lived experience of factors quantitatively found to positively or negatively determine cultural participation levels: encouragement, environment, education, employment, and ethnicity. This study identified additional social, developmental, cultural, wellbeing and practical drivers to participation in a group activity, supporting studies focused on a single activity (e.g., Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Kassavou et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2017; Griffin et al., 2019; MacGillivray et al., 2019) to demonstrate these drivers collectively across multiple activities. Further this study supports research evidencing social, developmental, cultural and wellbeing benefits derived from group participation (e.g., Elbeshausen, 2007; Brown Wilson et al., 2011; Horghagen et al., 2013; Kenning, 2015; Campana et al., 2016; Pearce, 2016; Dingle et al., 2017; Stickley et al., 2019; Cahill et al., 2020) and the significance of perceiving having benefitted in motivating continued participation (Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Hanson et al., 2016; Shipman & McGrath, 2016).

This study identified that the availability of library groups stimulated library use in areas of multiple deprivations both from within the local community and elsewhere in the city, providing a catalyst to connect with library services amongst existing, lapsed, and non-users. This finding supports research evidencing existing library use in motivating group participation (Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007; Griffin, 2019), and provides additional insight of the ability of group activity to motivate library use. Further this study supports and extends research exploring the significance of childhood encouragement (e.g., Scottish Government, 2010; Miles & Sullivan, 2012), and the nurturing role of mothers (Dumais, 2002) to lifelong cultural participation. Empirical evidence was provided of the role of public library groups in helping to break the cycle of a lack of childhood encouragement to participate in cultural activity by both motivating mothers to bring their children to the library and inspiring library use amongst adults who experienced a lack of childhood encouragement. Regular participation was demonstrated as increasing the use of library resources, particularly collections, aiding intertwined issues of cultural and digital divide. Further regular

participation in a library group was found to facilitate the encountering and sharing of information, increasing awareness of opportunities for cultural participation both within the library and beyond, supporting and extending similar findings. (Prigoda & McKenzie 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009; Houghton et al., 2013).

### 6.1.2 Research Question 2

#### **What is the public library role in stimulating and strengthening social connection amongst individuals, groups, and communities? Does this provide a third route to the development of cultural capital?**

This study evidenced that the provision of varied groups in public libraries stimulated socialisation in communities by offering opportunities for cultural participation in familiar shared activities, which serendipitously and purposively enabled and encouraged social interaction and connection. In all six groups an interest in a specific activity (e.g. knitting, reading etc) motivated participation, which provided the catalyst for interaction in communities amongst participants who, due to the inherently social nature of groups, formed connections during participation. Further in five groups, (excluding adult literacy and numeracy), some participants utilised library groups specifically as a conduit to socialisation with the group's activity of secondary importance to the opportunity for social interaction. Lastly in five groups, (excluding adult literacy and numeracy) a combination of both activity interest and a desire to socialise with others with shared interests, experiences, or locality motivated participation.

The library as the place where groups were held played a key role in stimulating connection amongst group members, factors identified as important were atmosphere, environment, and staff attitude. The library atmosphere, perceived by participants as comfortable, welcoming, encouraging, relaxed, friendly, and lively, was conducive to socialisation as participants felt encouraged and free to communicate with others. The library environment sparked and shaped conversation with library collections providing a conduit to conversation and connection. The friendly attitude of familiar library staff helped to foster the sociable atmosphere and environment, both during group sessions through specific staff approaches and the provision of refreshments and comfortable seating for groups and beyond by providing support for further socialisation and signposting to other opportunities. Participation in a public library group enhanced the ability of libraries to

function as place for members, with groups as opposed to the library more broadly, found to serve as a third place due to approachability, accessibility, and sociability factors.

This study demonstrated in the library context that group participation expands social networks, extends socialisation beyond groups, and foster connection. Further groups encourage bonding, with the sustained socialisation enabled by routine participation providing the building blocks needed to strengthen connections and generate social capital. Regular interaction enabled different levels of connection to develop between members, with group participation evidenced as having strengthened pre-existing connections between acquaintances and neighbours and forged new bonds amongst strangers and library staff. Groups were valued by participants for facilitating social connection as opposed to solely social interaction, with sustained socialisation alleviating feelings of social isolation by enabling connection and encouraging bonding. Conversation within groups was not limited to the group's activity, with library groups providing rich information grounds in which the serendipitous and purposeful social sharing of information sparked and sustained conversations. The opportunity to talk about varied topics helped to foster friendships and feelings of camaraderie as participants shared information, banter and stories bonding over shared interests, experiences, or locality.

The researcher found routine interaction aided the development of a sociable and supportive environment in library groups which helped to strengthen connections amongst participants. Library groups provided valued and vital sites for wellbeing and development, where participants shared problems and personal matters and supplied encouragement and advice with the widespread provision of peer support evidenced as a common feature, irrespective of activity, of group participation. Further the sociable and supportive environment was found to be important in building trust amongst fellow group members which enabled continued participation and progress, particularly amongst participants who felt they had experienced stigma in other environments due to health, ability, or personal circumstances. This study identified support, trust, interaction, connection, atmosphere, activity, and perception, as common features of group participation which served as generating mechanisms for bonding and bridging social capital.

This study demonstrated the significance of social connections to both initial and continued participation in a public library group. In providing a mechanism of stimulating and strengthening connections, whilst overcoming barriers to and providing a driver for cultural participation, public library groups were found by the researcher to aid the development of cultural capital. Sustained participation in a public library group was found to provide a third route, distinct from the home and school, to generate cultural capital. Public Library groups constituting both a form of reader development activity and cultural participation, generated objectified cultural capital through increasing awareness of, access to and the accessibility of library collections, with an intermediary role encompassing both people and place identified. Further groups, provided intertwined community-based opportunities for lifelong learning and participation, enabling the generation of institutionalised cultural capital by encouraging development in the cultural context. Foundational to this process was the demonstrated ability of groups to generate embodied cultural capital by providing a source of cultural engagement, through offering opportunities for sustained cultural participation perceived by participants as purposeful and meaningful.

This study identified a holistic relationship between cultural and social capital generation, with library groups providing sites for local cultural participation which animated library spaces and increased their accessibility, by connecting people and place in the cultural context. Regular cultural participation with others, perceived as meaningful and purposeful, aided both connection and development sparked, shaped, and sustained by activity and atmosphere. Library groups, irrespective of activity, were found to provide structured opportunities for social interaction surrounded by library collections and information which served as the catalyst to share and build cultural knowledge through conversation. The library as the place where the group was held was foundational to this process, enabling and encouraging discussion about culture which was valued both intellectually and instrumentally for providing a conduit to cultural development and social interaction. The quantity and quality of available public library groups enabled regular and routine cultural participation, motivating sustained participation by generating deep feelings of engagement with a specific activity, place and/or group of people and a perception of having derived social, cultural, wellbeing, development benefit.

### 6.1.2.1 *Research Question 2: Original Contribution*

This study identified that central to enabling and encouraging socialisation in public libraries, was an important combination of activity and atmosphere which sparked, shaped, and helped to sustain routine participation. Continued participation was important in generating social capital with library groups providing a valued and for some vital routine opportunity for socialisation, enabling people of all ages to interact regularly with others in communities through local participation in a familiar shared activity. This study advances our understanding of the ability of regular participatory activity to build social capital in public libraries by stimulating conversation, interaction, and connection (e.g., Gong et al., 2008, Griffis & Johnson, 2014; Miller, 2014). Sustained socialisation amongst participants was found to have strengthened connections, forged bonds, built trust, and facilitated the giving and receiving of peer support. The findings of this study support and extend on existing evidence, in both a LIS and health context in relation to a single activity, of the role of group participation in a shared activity in enabling bonding (e.g. Sedo, 2003; Prigoda & McKenzie 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009; Pearce, 2016; Shipman & McGrath, 2016; MacGillivray et al., 2019) and the provision of peer support (e.g., Stooke & McKenzie, 2009; Walwyn & Rowley, 2011; Brown Wilson et al, 2011; Horghagen, 2014; Thomson et al., 2015; Shipman & McGrath, 2016; Pearce et al., 2016).

This study provides the first empirical evidence of the role of library group participation in generating of objectified, institutionalised, and embodied cultural capital by providing community-based opportunities for lifelong learning and participation and a source of purposeful meaningful cultural engagement which increased awareness of access to and the accessibility of library collections. Further by evidencing a mutually reinforcing relationship between cultural and social capital, this study provides the first qualitative evidence of a 'feedback loop' between social and cultural capital derived from 'active' cultural participation with others in group activity (Jeannotte, 2003, p.45-46). Library groups were found to enable cultural knowledge to be built and shared through conversation, both contributing to existing understanding of the ability of group activity to function as information grounds (e.g., Fisher et al., 2004; McKenzie et al., 2007; Prigoda & McKenzie, 2007), whilst advancing understanding of how this aids the development of social and cultural capital. Dual factors of people and place were identified as providing the catalyst to

cultural development and social connection in disadvantaged communities, with this study providing the first evidence in the library context of the significance of routine group activity in providing structured opportunities for the deployment of 'culture talk' particularly amongst the elderly (Lizardo, 2016, p.14).

### 6.1.3 Research Question 3

#### **What constitutes 'engagement' in the cultural context? What is the public library role in encouraging and enabling cultural engagement within areas of multiple deprivations, how can this be evidenced and utilised to better demonstrate impact and advocate value?**

Moving away from a quantitatively informed focus on frequency and variety prevalent in the literature, to spotlight the importance of motivation and meaning, the researcher defined cultural engagement as the sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by. This study identified that public libraries encourage cultural engagement by offering varied opportunities for regular enjoyable cultural participation which reflect the wants and needs of communities in disadvantaged areas. The availability of group activity in libraries stimulated cultural participation by satisfying shared motivations such as activity interest, a desire for socialisation, benefit to wellbeing, aid to development, and practical considerations. Public libraries, specifically through the provision of public library groups were demonstrated as becoming more relevant within communities with the shift to a more participatory cultural and social offer resonating with existing users and previous non-users who were actively seeking opportunities for participation. This study evidenced that sustained participation in a public library group increased not only the relevance of public libraries in disadvantaged communities, but also their perceived importance, by becoming a source of cultural engagement and a valued part of everyday life.

This study evidenced that public library groups enable cultural engagement by providing opportunities for sustained cultural participation which are perceived by participants as purposeful and meaningful. The researcher found that regular library group participation was valued for providing structure and purpose to everyday routines, particularly amongst new mothers, retired or unemployed participants who had experienced a change in circumstances which had altered or limited their routine. Perceptions of purpose



encompassed both action and activity, with groups providing a regular reason to leave the house and scheduled sites for progression in or enjoyment of activities. Across six activities and nine libraries the researcher identified the importance of regular participation in generating deeper feelings of engagement with a specific activity, place and/or group of people. As attested to in the depth of sentiment and emotive language used by participants to convey what the group meant to them, sustained participation in a public library group constituted a form of cultural engagement due to the significance of groups in the everyday lives of participants.

Library groups were demonstrated as both addressing social exclusion and stimulating community engagement, by using a focused activity to routinely bring people together of all ages and backgrounds, which both reduced isolation and increased awareness of available resources, services, and activities within the library as well as locally within the community. The researcher identified a connection between regular library group participation and perceptions of public libraries as approachable, accessible, and sociable places, with participant responses revealing feelings of trust, comfort, and familiarity. Library groups, by encouraging sustained cultural engagement, were found to enable the library to become a third place (home away from home) for participants, with groups providing safe, stimulating, and sociable opportunities to enjoy culture and connection.

This study evidenced that through encouraging and enabling cultural engagement in areas of multiple deprivations, public library groups provide a source of empowerment and enrichment amongst individuals. The researcher found that positive experiences of participation inspired feelings of empowerment, particularly amongst participants with low literacy levels and physical or mental health concerns, with the dual importance of autonomy and ability achieved via routine attendance identified as significant in boosting self-esteem and satisfaction with life. Public library groups enriched solitary activities, already valued by participants as cathartic, therapeutic or relaxing, via the addition of a social element which aided wellbeing in diverse areas such as healthy aging, increased relaxation and confidence and decreased anxiety and isolation. Regular socialisation with others, ranging from casual interaction to deep connection experienced during and beyond group attendance, was perceived as a benefit of participation enriching the everyday lives of

participants due to the provision of company and support amongst local people with shared interests or experiences.

The definition of cultural engagement proposed in this study, which emphasises the significance of sustained participation in a cultural activity in fostering meaningfulness, was demonstrated by the researcher as conducive to facilitating a more inclusive understanding of cultural capital in the library context. In sensitising embodied cultural capital as cultural engagement, the researcher identified amongst individuals in disadvantaged communities the significance of motivation and meaning. Public library groups enabled the embodiment of culture by providing multiple diverse and inclusive entry points to sustained cultural participation which facilitated development for people of all ages and abilities.

Development, reflecting the idea of progression and encompassing both literacy development and lifelong learning, was found to be positively influenced by dual facilitative factors of place and people. This study has qualitatively evidenced that public library groups generate cultural capital by providing engaging, enriching, and empowering intertwined community-based opportunities for learning and participation in the cultural context which increase awareness of, access to, and the accessibility of library collections, enabling participants to connect with library collections, resources, services, staff, and fellow users.

This study demonstrated that operationalising cultural engagement to empirically evidence the impact of opportunities for participatory group activity in public libraries, provides a useful tool with which to better understand and advocate the key sociocultural role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities. The qualitative methods utilised in this study enabled the researcher to illuminate public library group participation from an insider perspective, capturing a more meaningful understanding of participants experiences and attitudes. Group participation was found to provide a catalyst to positive perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries amongst lifelong and new library users, with participants sharing an increased belief in the importance of public libraries for them personally and for communities. The depth of insight provided by this study of the significance of library groups to participants, highlights the need to move beyond a reliance on solely quantitatively informed understandings of impact, to evidence and advocate the true value of public libraries.

### *6.1.3.1 Research Question 3: Original Contribution*

This study evidenced that public libraries generate cultural engagement in areas of multiple deprivations by providing varied free, flexible, and fun library groups, which encourage and enable sustained active participation. Library group participation perceived as purposeful and meaningful by participants, was valued for providing everyday social, cultural, development or wellbeing benefits which enriched and empowered by functioning as ‘a third place’ to enjoy culture and connection. This study contributes to existing research focusing on the varied benefits of everyday cultural participation (e.g., Miles, 2016; Miles & Gibson, 2016; Brook, 2016; Miles & Gibson, 2017; Delrieu & Gibson, 2017), providing depth of insight in the library context of the significance of intrinsic place features of public libraries to generating cultural engagement. In grouping Oldenburg’s eight third place characteristics into three themes: approachability, accessibility, and sociability, this study evidenced that public library groups met each of the criteria requisite to be characterised as a third place. This study expands on existing LIS research which has failed to evidence public libraries as third place (Leckie & Hopkins, 2002; Putnam et al., 2003; Fisher et al, 2007b), providing depth of insight to research exploring how local amenities, including libraries, can function as a third place in disadvantaged communities (Hickman, 2013) and the significance of purposeful activity in this process (Houghton et al, 2013; Griffin et al., 2019).

Public library groups were qualitatively evidenced as generating cultural capital by providing opportunities for learning and participation which increased awareness of, access to, and the accessibility of library collections, evidencing Rasmussen’s (2016, p.550) suggestion that ‘participation could be a valuable supplement’ to the creation of cultural capital in public libraries. Adopting a qualitative methodology, enabled the researcher to evidence ‘the modalities of engagement’ (e.g., motivation, meaning and barriers) which quantitative methods fail to capture (Silva, 2006, P1185) generating the first empirical evidence of the role of public library groups in addressing issues of cultural divide by stimulating cultural engagement. The opportunity but not obligation to routinely participate in familiar shared activities in areas of interest and need increased the relevance and importance of public libraries amongst existing users and previous non-users, raised awareness of available services and provided a catalyst to positive perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries. This study has demonstrated that evidencing the holistic impact of

cultural engagement generated via participatory group activity, provides a useful tool with which to better understand and advocate the contemporary sociocultural role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities. This finding builds on existing research evidencing the impact of libraries in the lives of users, which has failed to consider the ability of group activity to both improve awareness of library services and increase the reach, relevance, and personal importance of public libraries (e.g., Sin & Vakkari, 2015; Carnegie, 2017a).

## 6.2 Limitations

A limitation of research is the issue of generalisability, therefore it is important to consider the extent to which the results presented in this study relating to members of public library groups located in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow could be applied to other populations or in different contexts. The researcher chose to explore cultural engagement amongst public library group participants as previous research has evidenced that in Glasgow and areas of multiple deprivation specifically, people are less likely to participate in cultural activities (Myerscough, 2011). However, whilst the researcher has provided significant depth of insight by including nine libraries and six types of group activity, the experiences, and perspectives of participants in this study cannot be stated as transferable to all people participating in public library groups or all areas classified as disadvantaged. For example, as demonstrated via participant demographics, not all participants using a library located in the most deprived areas (<25% SIMD) lived in that community, with the attractiveness of some groups drawing participants to a library from the most affluent surrounding areas (>SIMD 95%). The researcher chose not to exclude any participants based upon their SIMD rating as identified by their postcode (provided during interview), as this would have been contrary to the research aim to better understand what motivated participation in these areas.

A further accepted limitation of research is bias, as a librarian conducting research in the public library context the researcher recognised from the outset that both acknowledging and avoiding bias would be important in ensuring the validity of this study. However, in being open with study participants during initial recruitment and subsequent interactions regarding both their prior professional experience as a librarian in Glasgow and positive childhood experiences of public library use, neutrality could not be maintained. The

researcher's decision to share personal information with participants when requested or relevant was done so in the spirit of transparency and to aid the research process by facilitating acceptance, building trust, and stimulating connection with no intent to create bias. Specifically, during participant observation in which the researcher was actively involved over a number of weeks with groups which were inherently social in nature, to maintain neutrality would have meant the researcher withholding information and being unable to fully participate in conversations which would have had a detrimental impact upon the success of the study. To avoid bias the researcher had intended to complete a methodological log of research decisions during data collection and analysis, but this was not completed at either point as the researcher perceived these processes as natural and standard at the time and felt it was unnecessary. However, this omission is acknowledged as a limitation, as the completion of a log would have aided both researcher reflexivity during the research process and future replication of this study.

## 6.3 Reflection

### 6.3.1 Research Journey

In planning the empirical component of this study, the researcher categorised library groups based upon what they perceived to be the groups primary focus: social, developmental, and cultural. Through participant observation and interview the researcher became aware of an additional fourth category wellbeing, which for some participants was perceived as either the sole or joint function of a library group. The decision to include a broad range of activities, two in each of the applied categories, was influenced by a desire to better understand the role of library groups collectively as opposed to individually, which had been identified as a research gap during literature review. The researcher anticipated that simultaneously participating in two different groups of the same activity type (e.g., two walking groups, two knitting groups etc) during each fieldwork block would generate richer insight by enabling comparison of participant experiences and perspectives. This approach to fieldwork (three categories, six activities, nine libraries, twelve groups) proved successful in gathering and useful in presenting research data, with applying categories to library groups providing a useful and flexible point of reference in planning and conducting fieldwork, and then subsequently when structuring the discussion chapter.

The researcher drew on their extensive experience of working with the public in a library setting to connect with participants during fieldwork feeling, during both approach to and observation of groups, that having experience of and enthusiasm for public libraries helped to bridge the gap with participants. The researcher had hoped that getting to know groups during observation would be of assistance when recruiting participants for interview, with an increased familiarity helping to reduce anxiety. However, surprisingly participants who volunteered to be interviewed included a mix of participants with whom the researcher had both had lots of and limited contact with. The researcher's decision to interview all participants who volunteered following group observation generated both opportunities and challenges. A key benefit was the rich data gathered from interviewing all 42 participants and the depth of insight this enabled. Conversely, the large volume of data generated proved problematic with the high number of interviews to transcribe, analyse, code, and discuss both labour intensive and time consuming. Whilst interviewing participants the researcher learned the importance of being considerate and adaptable such as asking participants to choose arrangements to ensure their comfort and convenience and conducting whole group interviews with two vulnerable groups in which many of the participants would have been unable to participate independently.

The researcher experienced three difficult situations during fieldwork, which all required adopting a sensitive approach. The first was the sudden death of a participant within a group in which the researcher had been involved with for a few weeks. Having formed a bond with group members including the deceased during observation, the researcher felt it was appropriate to attend the funeral and remain with the group than withdraw at that point as scheduled. The second situation involved navigating feelings of distrust amongst one group comprised, unbeknown to the researcher prior to initial approach, of participants with mental health concerns who feared the impact published research detailing their active participation in a group could have on their benefit status. To obtain observation consent, the researcher provided reassurances both of the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of the research, whilst to gain interview consent, interview questions were circulated in advance to increase transparency and trust. The third situation involved a withdrawal request from an interview participant who following a joint interview with a fellow group member raised ethical objections to the study. The researcher immediately

notified their supervisor and followed department protocol, contacting the participant to notify them that the interview recording, and all paperwork would be destroyed. This situation proved particularly upsetting, given the positive experience of all other previous interviews and the lack of any indication during the interview that the process was unintentionally and unexpectedly causing distress.

### 6.3.2 Professional Impact

Following the end of the research funding period, the researcher returned to professional practice working as a librarian whilst completing this thesis. As a librarian working in the public library sector, responsible for the delivery of group activities and events, the knowledge gained during completion of this research has been utilised to inform and improve practice on an ongoing basis. Prior to beginning the PhD, the researcher had delivered both bounce and rhyme (songs/rhymes/story without additional elements) and Bookbug (songs/rhymes/story with additional elements such as puppets/lycra/bubbles) sessions in communities (affluent and deprived) without fully being aware of the significance to development and wellbeing of these sessions both for children and parents. Following completion of the empirical component of this study, the researcher has applied the knowledge gained to influence both the delivery of sessions and additional outreach activities such as a presentation on the science of Bookbug during a program of wellbeing focused events. Further, the increased awareness of varied contemporary approaches to extend libraries into communities and the benefits of walking, was utilised to secure external funding to create a range of outdoor community activities themed around a Bookbug picture book incorporating social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing elements.

The researcher's PhD journey, specifically the knowledge gained directly via research focusing on book groups and indirectly via professional connection with a fellow researcher exploring the information behaviours of the visually impaired, has proved beneficial whilst operating a book group for the visually impaired. The researcher has utilised both the experience of participant observation and the evidence generated via observation and interview of book group participants to benefit the group. The researcher encouraged socialisation, signposted members to additional opportunities to enjoy culture and connection and offered a book selection tailored both to identified interests and to widen horizons. Further recognising the importance of bonding and the provision of support

amongst groups, during the pandemic the researcher has been in contact with members socially, facilitated interaction between members and posted resources to help overcome barriers to physical and digital access (disability, lack of internet access). A benefit of PhD research is the opportunity for collaboration and connection, which increases awareness of other areas of research. Participating in a departmental research group, enabled the researcher to develop an enhanced understanding of the issues faced by visually impaired library users in accessing information both within the library and beyond, which influenced the decision to include a tech club offering information and advice on inclusive accessible technologies as part of the book group.

The researcher identified via literature review and participant interviews, the significance of childhood experiences of libraries to lifelong library use. This knowledge in conjunction with personal experience of their positive impact, has influenced the researcher's commitment to making libraries more engaging for children by offering inspiring collections and animating libraries through activity. In evidencing the impact of public libraries offering participatory activity in communities, the researcher having responsibility for both the management of library branches in areas of multiple deprivation and an authority wide remit for children and young people, has sought to enhance existing and develop new library programs which encourage participation. For example, the researcher established new computer coding and reading groups for children, offered a more dynamic model for primary school class visits, and expanded the programme of an annual collaboration with the museums department to include additional interactive children's content. In addition, with the pandemic having a significant impact on the delivery of core programs such as the national Summer Reading Challenge, the researcher developed an accompanying program fronted by a local celebrity to facilitate connection digitally with local families.

## 6.4 Recommendations for further research

This study provides the first empirical evidence in the library context of the significance of participatory group activity in addressing issues of cultural divide by enabling and encouraging cultural engagement, generating cultural and social capital, and extending the reach and relevance of public libraries in disadvantaged communities. The researcher



recommends that additional research is conducting which builds on the findings of this study in intertwined areas of both academic and professional interest.

#### 6.4.1 Cultural Engagement

This study in defining cultural engagement as the sustained cultural behaviours and practices which individuals and communities feel actively involved with and enriched by, qualitatively evidenced the significance of sustained participation in cultural activity with others in building cultural and social capital. More qualitative research is needed which explores these concepts in tandem as opposed to isolation. Utilising the definition of cultural engagement originated in this study could provide a tool with which to facilitate a more inclusive understanding of cultural and social capital generation in related publicly funded cultural sectors (e.g., museums, art galleries and archives) offering regular opportunities for participation and connection with others in communities. Additionally, this study evidenced the ability of library groups to function as both information ground and third place which aided the generation of cultural and social capital. More research exploring cultural engagement is needed both theoretical and empirical to understand and evidence the link between these four concepts.

#### 6.4.2 Childhood Encouragement

This study has evidenced a long-standing role for public libraries in addressing issues of cultural divide by appealing to families. The researcher influenced by the work of Bourdieu, explored in the library context both the current motivations of new mothers and the past childhood experiences of participants of all ages, evidencing that mothers functioned and continue to function as gatekeepers to library use. The researcher found that most mothers perceived public libraries as places appropriate for and conducive to child development, further researcher could explore both perception and experience of parents (mothers and fathers), library staff and child development professionals of the library role in child development. Further a longitudinal study of childhood library use encompassing both parental/practitioner perspectives and developmental impact would evidence the contribution of public libraries in this area. This study found that the absence of parental encouragement had a negative impact on both reading for pleasure and library use amongst some participants with this most noticeable amongst, but not limited to, members of adult

literacy and numeracy groups. Research, both quantitative and qualitative, is needed exploring this finding in a much larger sample of adults with low literacy levels.

### 6.4.3 Library Collections

This study has demonstrated that the value of library collections cannot be understood by issue statistics alone. Library collections were evidenced as an important feature of library group participation utilised for inspiration and interest in cultural groups, providing a source of encouragement to developmental groups and a conduit to conversation within social groups. More research is needed, empirical and theoretical, which explores both the larger symbolic significance of making items publicly available and the personal significance of collections to library users. Applications of Bourdieusian theory in relation to the legitimacy library collection development policies confer on items has been limited (e.g., Bouthillier, 2000; Budd, 2003), however would provide a useful lens through which to approach a range of current topical subjects such as for example the polarising availability of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) children's collections in public libraries. Further, more research is needed which evidences the meaningfulness of available collections for individuals, for example the positive or negative impact to the wellbeing of LGBTQ children of having/not having access to fiction and non-fiction resources with which they personally identify in their local library.

### 6.4.4 Wellbeing

This study has evidenced that participation in a public library group, irrespective of activity, is beneficial to wellbeing. The researcher believes that future LIS research by moving away from a narrow focus on specific targeted wellbeing programs (e.g., therapeutic reading groups) to consider the benefits to wellbeing of standard services (e.g., book groups) would provide a more holistic understanding of the wellbeing role of public libraries. For example, this study evidenced the significance of scheduled activity in providing a sense of purpose for participants with routines limited by circumstances (e.g., retired, unemployed, maternity leave). A future research study could prove a focused exploration of the library role in the wellbeing of individuals experiencing specific life situations such as retirement, unemployment, or parenthood, in addition to other circumstances such as health, homelessness, immigration status or marital status (e.g., divorce or bereavement). Further,

this study evidenced the ability of sustained group activity to provide a tool for empowerment for participants experiencing challenging physical or mental health problems (e.g., mobility, disability, addiction, and anxiety). A future LIS research study could provide an in-depth exploration of a specific area, to evidence for example the impact of local library group activity on the recovery process.

## 6.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

### 6.5.1 Policy

At policy level, both professional and governmental, the important contribution of public libraries as places for participation within disadvantaged communities is not sufficiently recognised. Ingham (2015, p.154) has suggested that within disadvantaged communities ‘cultural policies pertaining to libraries should be directed toward developing library services that... foster more comprehensive kinds of cultural capital and social inclusion’. This research has empirically evidenced that the provision of varied group activities within disadvantaged communities provides a mechanism of meeting both these objectives. In Scotland’s first public library strategy *Ambition and Opportunity* (SLIC, 2015) this aspect of the library role was absent from the six aims outlined. In a refresh of the strategy (SLIC, 2019, p.16-17) an expanded understanding of the ‘health and social wellbeing’ role of libraries recognised the importance of providing a ‘safe, friendly and welcoming space to meet’ and the ability of group activity within libraries to ‘contribute to tackling social isolation and loneliness’. This research, in demonstrating the important socio-cultural role of libraries in encouraging participation and enabling engagement via routine group activity, could help inform further development of the strategy by shifting focus from targeted programs (SLIC, 2020) to the holistic benefit to wellbeing generated by ‘semi-curated’ ‘ordinary’ group activities (Robinson, 2020, p.557-558).

At a national level, the importance of libraries as sites for cultural participation within communities is noticeably absent from *A Culture Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2020, p.8), which outlines an ‘overarching’ national vision of culture in ‘synergy’ with existing sector strategies (e.g., libraries). The strategy advocates that ‘Cultural engagement has a significant impact on wellbeing and delivers many benefits’ highlighting the value of ‘Shared cultural experiences’ and having ‘the opportunity to participate’

(Scottish Government, 2020, pp.8-9). Further the strategy addresses the need to ‘extend the view of culture to include the everyday’ and the specific importance of cultural engagement for the elderly in enabling individuals to ‘age actively, maintain good health and be engaged...take part in a variety of cultural activities, enriching their life and maintaining social connections’ (Scottish Government, 2020, pp.40-43). This study has empirically evidenced that public libraries are achieving this vision through the provision of attractive accessible everyday cultural activities within communities which connect and enrich. However, as argued by Carnegie (2017, pp.7-10) the contribution of public libraries to achieving policy objectives can often go ‘unrecognised’, characterised by a need to better evidence ‘participation and impact’ to ‘persuade those that are sceptical about the role and value of public libraries’. This research in qualitatively evidencing the positive impact of participation in group activity provides empirically informed insight of the social, cultural, developmental and wellbeing role of public libraries, highlighting the need for greater understanding and advocacy of the significance of libraries as places for participation in professional and governmental policy.

### 6.5.2 Practice

This study evidenced that public libraries increased their reach and relevance in communities by enabling and encouraging sustained cultural participation. Offering group activities locally resonated with existing, lapsed, and non-users, many of whom who were actively looking for opportunities. Animating libraries through activity, as opposed to *‘just’* providing books, stimulated regular library use and increased the personal importance of libraries to individuals. The availability of group activity in libraries should be a core offering not a postcode lottery, with a commitment to establishing and supporting groups a professional priority. Whilst most library services offer book groups and pre-school groups, they are not typically offered in every library branch or in the same quantity and variety and as demonstrated there can be difficulty in making staff available to run groups on a regular basis. Amongst library staff, both senior management and customer facing, recognition is needed of the positive impact group activity generates in the lives of our users and the enabling and encouraging role of staff in this process. This research in evidencing the important combination of activity and atmosphere in library groups, highlights that by embracing libraries as places for participation, staff can help to make libraries more

approachable and accessible within communities for people who may otherwise be unwilling or unable to use our service.

A review of existing best practice of the delivery of varied group activities within public libraries could aid staff development by providing an evidence base from which to develop a cultural participation toolkit. For example, Bookbug, devised by Scottish Booktrust and operating in every library service in Scotland, provides an excellent model of training, support, and resources for library staff which builds confidence and capability, in addition to commitment at a service level for groups as a core offering. Developing a similar toolkit for other kinds of activities (e.g., book groups) which provides guidance on the what (typical session components), how (practical consideration such as duration, frequency, and optimum group numbers) and why (evidence base) of group activity would support staff establishing, operating or facilitating groups. Further although outwith the scope of this study, this research arguably has implications for new students entering the library profession who should be aware of the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing public libraries and the role that group activity can play in addressing these. In developing academic curriculums for library students at post graduate level, instilling a focus on the importance of encouraging cultural participation and enabling cultural engagement as a key aspect of the librarians remit in the public library sector should be a priority.

Lastly, as highlighted by both participants in this study and library users and non-users across the UK (Carnegie, 2017a), libraries need to better advertise and advocate the services they offer with the current approach of advertising internally (physically in branches and digitally on corporate website/social media) having limited reach. Participants in this study felt that library staff should proactively go out into the local community and advertise what is currently available, with many sharing that through participating in a group they had become more aware of library services and resources via routinely visiting a library branch, signposting from session leaders or conversation with other group members. Whilst some participants were recommended library groups by external agencies (e.g., health and employment), more outreach is needed with local community groups and venues such as nurseries and mothers' groups to promote early years services and with care homes, community centres and local interest groups to advertise available adult group activities.

This study has demonstrated that offering opportunities for participation brings people into libraries by appealing to existing users and non-users, undoubtedly the potential reach of group activity would be boosted by increased external promotion.

## 6.6 Final Summary

This research sought to better understand the public library role in addressing issues of cultural divide by enabling and encouraging cultural engagement in areas of multiple deprivations in Glasgow. Library group participation was utilised as a case study to explore the drivers and barriers to cultural participation, the meanings and motivations associated with participatory group activity, and the social and cultural role of public libraries. The empirical component of this study investigated 6 library group activities (knitting, walking, bounce and rhyme, adult literacy and numeracy, creative writing, and book groups) across 9 libraries in the most deprived areas in Glasgow (<25% SIMD). Utilising a qualitative methodology, encompassing participant observation of 12 groups and semi-structured interviews with 42 participants, the researcher evidenced the ability of library groups to bridge the cultural divide by stimulating cultural participation and supporting active sustained cultural engagement, generating the first empirical evidence in this area.

In demonstrating an interplay between participation, people, and place, this research makes an original contribution to existing limited understanding of the impact of library group activity in areas of multiple deprivations both for those participating and for library services.

- **Participants** valued library groups for generating social, cultural, development or wellbeing benefits. Group participation was positively perceived as purposeful and meaningful providing a source of cultural engagement in everyday routines, which for many were limited by health (physical and mental), employment (retirement and unemployment) or lifestyle factors (caring responsibilities, financial situation). Groups functioned as a third place to enjoy culture and connection, building cultural and social capital through regular cultural participation with others, which sparked, shaped, and sustained by activity and atmosphere aided both connection and development. Groups enriched and empowered by providing local access to sociable and supportive networks offering peer support and information, generating valued and vital boosts to wellbeing which decreased isolation and anxiety whilst increasing relaxation and confidence.

- **Public libraries** increased their reach and relevance in disadvantaged communities by offering group activities. The availability of diverse group activities stimulated library use, helping to overcome long-term barriers such as a lack of childhood encouragement, low literacy levels and perceptions of limited relevance, with the opportunity to participate locally in an activity focused on an identified interest or need, resonating with existing, lapsed, and non-users. Libraries by providing places for participation, animated through activity, increased awareness of, access to and the accessibility of their collections and provided a catalyst to positive perception change concerning the function and value of public libraries.

This study demonstrated that evidencing the holistic impact of cultural engagement generated via participatory group activity, provides a useful tool with which to better understand and advocate the contemporary sociocultural role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities. Providing the first empirical evidence in this area, this study highlights a need, particularly post-pandemic, within both professional practice and governmental policy for an increased recognition of and support for public libraries as places for participation. Building on this study, more qualitative research is needed which inclusively explores the library role in fostering cultural and social capital in disadvantaged communities via core reader development activities.

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# Appendices

# Appendix 1 Fieldwork Documentation

## 1.1 Participant Information Sheet

### The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

#### Information for Participants

**Who am I?** My name is Sarah Sweeney and I am a PhD student at Strathclyde University. I have previously worked in libraries across Scotland as both a volunteer and employee.

**What am I researching?** I am exploring the community role of public libraries in Glasgow. I'm interested in finding out why people use libraries, how using them makes them feel and what they think the benefits of and barriers to using public libraries are within their communities.

**Why would I like to involve library group members in my research?** By talking with members of a range of library groups in Glasgow I hope to understand what library groups mean to members and what motivates participation.

**What would I be doing?** Over the next few weeks I would like to join in with the group's activities. I will sometimes make notes of my observations, but no conversations will be audio recorded or photographs taken.

I also hope to interview some group's members to discuss their experiences of being a member of a library group and their opinions on public libraries in Glasgow. All Interviews will be:

- **Voluntary** – If you would like to be interviewed please add your name to the sign-up sheet.
- **Flexible**- You do not need to answer all my questions
- **Convenient**- Interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and be held in a public place (such as the library or local coffee shop) and at a date and time which suits you.
- **Private**- Interviews will be anonymised to ensure that you cannot be identified.

**What do you have to do to take part?** Just continue to participate in the library group as you would normally. Please feel free to chat with me as you would other group members. In addition, optional interviews will be conducted with willing group members.

**Do you have to take part?** No. Participation is voluntary. If you would rather not be involved, tell me and I will not include you in any observations I make on the group.

**Can you change your mind about being involved?** Yes. You can withdraw from my research at any point during the next six months and any information you have provided either during observation or interview will be deleted. If you change your mind about being involved, you can let me know using the contact details provided below. You do not have to provide an explanation.

**What happens to the data I collect from this group?** Anonymised data will be used for research purposes only. Your data may be used in published research, but not in a manner which would allow you to be identified. Data will be stored confidentially in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. At the end of my research, anonymised data be archived on institutional servers so it is available for other researchers.

**How can you contact me?** Please feel free to contact me with questions regarding my research:

- **Telephone:** 0141 548 4752
- **Email:** [sarah.sweeney@strath.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.sweeney@strath.ac.uk)
- **Address:** University of Strathclyde, LT1216, 26 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XH



## The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

### Information for Staff

**Who am I?** My name is Sarah Sweeney and I am a PhD student at Strathclyde University. I have previously worked in libraries across Scotland as both a volunteer and employee.

**What am I researching?** I am exploring the community role of public libraries in Glasgow. I'm interested in finding out why people use libraries, how using them makes them feel and what they think the benefits of and barriers to using public libraries are within their communities.

**Why would I like to involve library group members in my research?** By talking with members of a range of library groups in Glasgow I hope to understand what library groups mean to members and what motivates participation.

**What would I be doing?** Over the next few weeks I would like to join in with the activities of some library groups. I will sometimes make notes of my observations, but no conversations will be audio recorded or photographs taken.

I also hope to interview some group's members to discuss their experiences of being a member of a library group and their opinions on public libraries in Glasgow. All Interviews will be voluntary, flexible, convenient, and private.

**What would participation involve?** Library group members would continue to participate in the library group as they would normally, feeling free to chat me as they would other group members. In addition, optional interviews will be conducted with willing group members.

**Do group members have to participate?** No. Participation is voluntary. If a group member would rather not be involved in my research, if they tell me I will not include them in any observations I make on the group.

**Can group members change their mind about being involved?** Yes. Group members can withdraw from my research at any point during the next six months and any information provided either during observation or interview will be deleted. If a group member changes their mind about being involved, they can let me know using the contact details provided below. They do not have to provide an explanation.

**What happens to the data I collect from this group?** Anonymised data will be used for research purposes only. Data may be used in published research, but not in a manner which would allow identification of library users or venues. Data will be stored confidentially in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. At the end of my research, anonymised data be archived on institutional servers so it is available for other researchers.

**How can you contact me?** Please feel free to contact me with questions regarding my research:

- **Telephone:** 0141 548 4752
- **Email:** [sarah.sweeney@strath.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.sweeney@strath.ac.uk)
- **Address:** University of Strathclyde, LT1216, 26 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XH

## The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

My research is trying to better understand the community role of public libraries in Glasgow. I'm interested in finding out why people use libraries, how using them makes them feel and what they think the benefits of and barriers to using public libraries are within their communities. More information about the project can be found in the information sheet.

By taking part in this project, you will be helping me to understand what library groups like this one mean to members and what motivates participation.

**Thank you** for agreeing to be involved in my research.

### Group Observation Consent Form

- I have read the project information sheet and understand what participation in this project involves.
- I have had the chance to ask questions about the project, and the researcher has answered any queries I may have.
- I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw myself or my data at any time during the next three months whilst the research is being conducted and for a further three months after the research has been completed, without having to provide a reason for doing so.
- I understand that my data may be used anonymously in published research, but that my identity will remain confidential and no personally identifiable information will be made publicly available.
- I understand that the researcher may take notes whilst participating in the group, but that no conversations will be audio recorded or photographs taken.
- I agree to participate in this study.

**I confirm that I have read the information above, and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above project.**

Name of participant (please print):	
Participant's signature:	
Date:	

## The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

My research is trying to better understand the community role of public libraries in Glasgow. I'm interested in finding out why people use libraries, how using them makes them feel and what they think the benefits of and barriers to using public libraries are within their communities. More information about the project can be found in the information sheet.

By taking part in this project, you will be helping me to understand what library groups like this one mean to members and what motivates participation.

**Thank you** for agreeing to be involved in my research.

### Interview Consent Form

- I have read the project information sheet and understand what being interviewed for this project involves.
- I have had the chance to ask questions about the interview process and the researcher has answered any queries I may have.
- I confirm that I have volunteered to be interviewed for this project and have not been coerced in any way.
- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any questions and end the interview without explanation.
- I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw myself or my data at any time during the next three months whilst the research is being conducted and for a further three months after the research has been completed, without having to provide a reason for doing so.
- I understand that my data may be used anonymously in published research, but that my identity will remain confidential and no personally identifiable information will be made publicly available.
- I understand that I have the right to decline to have the interview audio-recorded
- I agree to an ANONYMOUS copy of this interview to be kept securely by Strathclyde University.

**I confirm that I have read the information above, and am willing to be interviewed for the above project.**

Name of participant (please print):	
Participant's signature:	
Date:	

## The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

<b>Date</b>			Audio- Recorded		Consent Obtained	
<b>Library Area:</b>	North West		North East		South	
<b>Group Type</b>	Social		Developmental		Cultural	
<b>Group Sub-Type</b>	Knitting	Walking	Bounce & Rhyme	ALN	Creative Writing	Book Group

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I'd like to begin by asking a few general questions:

<b>Name:</b>							Not Provided
<b>Gender:</b>	Male		Female		Not provided		
<b>Age Range:</b>	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	60-74	Not Provided	
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	White	Black/African	Asian	Mixed/Multiple	Other	Not Provided	
<b>Post Code:</b>			<b>Resident in Glasgow:</b>			Not Provided	
<b>Highest Education:</b>	School	College	University	Not provided			
<b>Parents Education:</b>	School	College	University	Not provided			
<b>Main Occupation:</b>							Not Provided
<b>Parents Occupation:</b>							Not Provided

Before going on to discuss your experiences of being a member of a library group and opinions on public libraries, I'd like to ask a few questions about other kinds of cultural events, places and activities you may have participated in:

<b>How frequently:</b>	Very Often	4	Fairly Often	3	Not very often	2	Not at all	1	Don't Know	0	Not Provided
<b>Visited within last 12 months</b>	Cinema		Museum		Art Gallery		Archive Repository		Historical Building		Historical Grounds
<b>Attended within last 12 months</b>	Concert		Theatre		Dance		Opera		Festival/Exhibition		Not Provided
<b>Privately participated</b>	Pleasure reading		Art/Crafts		Creative Writing		Photo/Video		Musical Instrument		Not Provided
<b>Participated with others:</b>	Dance		Music		Drama		Sport		Other		Not Provided
<b>Why do you go to some places/do certain activities and not others?</b>											Not Provided

## The role of public libraries in Glasgow's Communities

1. Can you tell me what motivated you to join the group?
  - A. How did you find out about it?
  - B. How long have you been a member and how often do you attend?
2. Why do you X and what does X do for you?
  - A. Do you feel you have benefitted from being a member of the group and if so how?
3. Why X as part of a group?
4. Thinking about other regular commitments you may have (work, friends, family, and hobbies) what would you say the group brings to your routine?
5. Through membership of the knitting group, have you become aware of or been recommended any other things you have tried such as: other groups, activities, places, books, movies, plays, museums?
6. Do you think that the library is a good venue for this group?
7. Do you use public libraries for anything other than the group?
8. Did you use public libraries as a child?
  - A. Were you encouraged to do so?
  - B. Did you enjoy going to the library?
  - C. Do you feel differently about libraries now as an adult than you did as a child?
9. Is your local library important to you?
  - A. Do you think your local library is important within your community?
10. Is there one thing you think the library could do to improve its role within your local community?



## Appendix 2 Coding Sheet

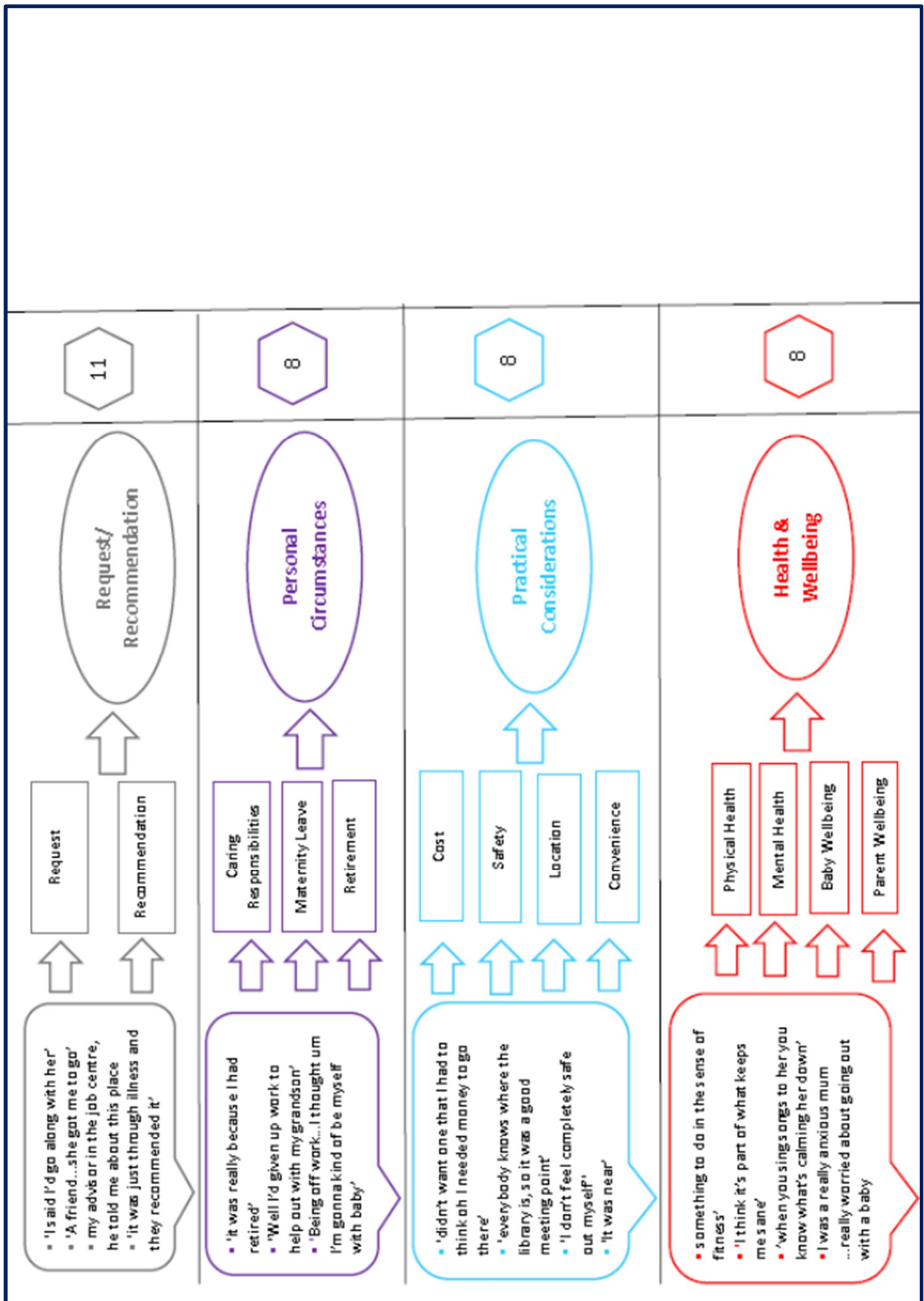
QUESTION:									
Group	Participant	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6	Code 7	Code 8
Walking	S/WG/E1/007								
Walking	S/WG/E1/002								
Walking	S/WG/E1/001								
Walking	S/WG/S1/013								
Walking	S/WG/S1/017								
Walking	S/WG/S1/018								
Walking	S/WG/S1/019								
Knitting	S/KG/E2/001								
Knitting	S/KG/E2/005								
Knitting	S/KG/E2/007								
Knitting	S/KG/S1/004								
Walking	S/KG/S1/005								
Knitting	S/KG/S1/010								
Walking	S/KG/S1/011								
<b>SOCIAL TOTAL</b>									
B & R	D-BR-E3-004								
B & R	D-BR-E3-005								
B & R	D-BR-E3-010								
B & R	D-BR-E3-012								
B & R	D-BR-W2-001								
B & R	D-BR-W2-003								
ALN	D-LN-W1-001								
ALN	D-LN-W1-003								
ALN	D-LN-W1-004								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-001								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-002								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-004								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-005								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-007								
ALN	D-LN-S 2-008								
<b>DEVELOPMENT TOTAL</b>									
Writing	C-CW-E2-001								
Writing	C-CW-E2-003								
Writing	C-CW-E2-004								
Writing	C-CW-E2-007								
Writing	C-CW-W3-002								
Book	C-BG-W3-001								
Book	C-BG-W3-002								
Book	C-BG-W3-003								
Book	C-BG-W3-004								
Book	C-BG-W3-005								
Book	C-BG-W3-006								
Book	C-BG-W3-010								
Book	C-BG-S3-005								
<b>CULTURAL TOTAL</b>									

<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Code 1:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 2:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 3:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 4:</td></tr> </table>	Code 1:	Code 2:	Code 3:	Code 4:	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>Code 5:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 6:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 7:</td></tr> <tr><td>Code 8:</td></tr> </table>	Code 5:	Code 6:	Code 7:	Code 8:
Code 1:									
Code 2:									
Code 3:									
Code 4:									
Code 5:									
Code 6:									
Code 7:									
Code 8:									

# Appendix 3 Coding & Analysis Example

Q1: CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO JOIN THE GROUP?				
Participant Quotes	Initial Codes	Final Code	Prevalence	Further Discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'so I can learn'</li> <li>'to help her'</li> <li>'skill that I wanted to learn'</li> <li>'The main thing is development'</li> <li>'to build up my knowledge'</li> <li>'I'm a slow reader and I find to stick to the one type of books'</li> </ul>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Professional Development</div> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Personal Development</div> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Child Development</div> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center; color: blue; font-weight: bold;">Development</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">23</div>	<p><b>CULTURAL CAPITAL</b></p> <p>Shared motivations to cultural participation such as activity interest, a desire for socialisation, benefit to wellbeing, aid to development, and practical considerations evidence the positive impact of a more participatory cultural offer, typified by broad range of library groups, in addressing issues of cultural divide</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'I used to go to something like this'</li> <li>'I've always enjoyed'</li> <li>'I've knitted all my life'</li> <li>'I love singing'</li> <li>'I've always been part of library groups'</li> </ul>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Knowledge</div> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Interest</div> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Experience</div> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid orange; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center; color: orange; font-weight: bold;">Pre-Existing</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid orange; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">19</div>	<p><b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b></p> <p>Motivated to expand social networks to meet others in a shared situation, with a shared interest or a shared locality. Library groups, help to expand social networks enabling connections to form via the opportunity for sustained social interaction amongst members.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'just social, social activity'</li> <li>'I wanted to meet people'</li> <li>'social side as well having a blether'</li> <li>'I don't have nobody so I just come to meet new people and also for my baby'</li> <li>'to meet other kids her age. I get to meet other parents as well'</li> </ul>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Socialisation</div> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Parent Socialisation</div> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; width: 30%;">Child Socialisation</div> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center; color: green; font-weight: bold;">Social</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">12</div>	



- 'I said I'd go along with her'
- 'A friend...she got me to go'
- my advisor in the job centre, he told me about this place
- 'it was just through illness and they recommended it'

- 'it was really because I had retired'
- 'Well I'd given up work to help out with my grandson'
- 'Being off work...I thought um I'm gonna kind of be myself with baby'

- 'didn't want one that I had to think oh I needed money to go there'
- 'everybody knows where the library is, so it was a good meeting point'
- 'I don't feel completely safe out myself'
- 'It was near'

- 'something to do in the sense of fitness'
- 'I think it's part of what keeps me sane'
- 'when you sings songs to her you know: what's calming her down'
- 'I was a really anxious mum ...really worried about going out with a baby'

## Appendix 4   Ethical Approval

### **Ethics application has been approved**

www-data <www-data@cis.strath.ac.uk>

Tue 24/01/2017 18:16

To: Sarah Sweeney <sarah.sweeney@strath.ac.uk>

Hello,

Your ethics application "The role of public libraries in Glasgow Communities " (ID: 512) has been approved.

URL: <https://local.cis.strath.ac.uk/wp/extras/ethics/index.php?view=512>

Ethics Approval System.

## Appendix 5   List of Figures

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