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**How can contemporary art contribute toward the development of social and
cultural capital for people aged 64+**

Abstract

Purpose: This article focuses on how visiting contemporary art galleries and discussing the artwork in facilitated focus groups impacted on culturally inactive participants' social and cultural capital. The research is taken from a larger study that explored the contribution that visiting contemporary art galleries made to the wellbeing of people aged 64+.

Design and methods: A total of 19 participants were given guided visits around three contemporary art galleries in the UK. Participants were drawn from categories identified as not already actively engaged in cultural activities (men, those with a limiting disability, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, those in lower socio-economic groups and people living alone). Before and after each visit, focus group interviews were used to gauge the impact of participation in the intervention in terms of subjective wellbeing. Follow-up interviews were held with participants and group leaders two years after the visits.

Results: Spontaneous reminiscence was a functional part of the discussion that facilitated shifts in participants' social and cultural capital. Participants developed bonding social capital with each other, bridging social capital with group leaders, and

linking social capital with gallery staff and researchers. Participants' cultural capital developed in terms of an increase in knowledge and understanding of contemporary art.

Implications: Understanding the interplay between social, cultural capital and reminiscence has implications for programmers and policy-makers trying to engage less culturally engaged participants in the arts. Developing bonding, bridging and linking social capital and cultural capital through engagement with the arts may have implications for health, particularly amongst this demographic.

Introduction

This article draws from a larger study taking place over 28 months, in which 56 participants visited three art galleries in the North East of England, UK, in an attempt to see how this impacted on their subjective wellbeing. Unlike other arts consumption research using quantitative methodologies, a qualitative data approach, using semi-structured focus groups and a constant comparison analysis process, was adopted to gauge the complex and subtle changes in participants' social and cultural capital.

This article investigates how conversations about art immediately following a guided visit to a contemporary art gallery facilitated the development of social capital for people who were 'culturally inactive' (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b). The respondents were drawn from categories identified as being less culturally engaged (Keaney and Oskala, 2007). Specifically, the paper examines whether discussing the artwork within a group context develops 'bonding' social capital between participants, 'bridging' social capital between participants and group leaders and 'linking' social capital between participants and arts educators and researchers.

Similarly, it examines the development of cultural capital in the form of engagement with contemporary art galleries. The paper also speculates on what qualities contemporary art has as an art form that makes it a suitable, yet perhaps unexpected, stimulus for developing relationships amongst these particular users.

Literature Review

Bourdieu (1986, pp. 46-58) provided the first systematic contemporary analysis of the interconnection between economic, cultural and social resources in 'The Forms of Capital', which has been particularly influential to sociologists in terms of understanding culture and social division in contemporary society. Bourdieu presents capital in three guises: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, which can all be convertible into one another under certain circumstances. A university education (institutionalised cultural capital) together with a network of contacts (social capital) can increase productivity for both the individual and the collective. The interaction of Bourdieu's constructs of social and cultural capital represents a way of explaining human motivations and behaviours within unequal social environments, particularly relevant to this study's participants who are unfamiliar with, and perhaps intimidated by, art galleries.

Social capital

Social capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam 2000: p.21). The volume of social capital possessed by an individual depends on

the size of the network of connections they can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in their own right by each of those to whom they are connected (Bourdieu 1986: p.51). Social capital can be indicated by social network type, a composite characterization of the interpersonal milieu in which people are embedded (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra 2011). The different types of relationships identified by Putnam that have been adopted in this paper are as follows: 'Bonding' relationships refer to links with members of families, within ethnic groups or socio-economic groups; 'bridging' refers to links with distant friends and colleagues; 'linking' refers to relationships between people from different social strata (Putnam, 2000). Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra noted different network types amongst elderly people: "diverse," "friend," "congregant," "family," "faith-based and "restricted" network types. These different network types represent differing levels of contact with family, friends and community groups, with different patterns of normative expectations and responsibilities. They found that respondents embedded in network types characterized by greater social capital tended to exhibit better wellbeing in terms of less loneliness, less anxiety, and greater happiness (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011). Aging typically involves profound challenges to social connectedness, such as retirement and bereavement, and Cornwell and Waite (2009) note the importance of policy related efforts to increase both social connectedness and the perceived availability of social resources among older adults. Therefore generating different forms of social capital seems particularly relevant for this demographic.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of

cultural goods (pictures, books, instruments etc.) and in the *institutionalized* state, in the form of educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986: p. 47). The Bourdieusian construct of cultural capital has been widely applied to understand an individual's ability to engage with high culture, in this case of this paper with contemporary art galleries. Cultural taste and consumption is an aspect of lifestyle that enables people to express a form of hierarchy beyond economic advantage (Bourdieu 1984). A person's habitus – their beliefs, behaviour and tastes - develop through exposure to fields, particularly within the reinforcing environments of the family and education. Therefore, a person's social capital influences their cultural capital. Similarly, knowledge of bourgeois cultural practices can allow people to enter prestigious social groups. Studies into arts consumption argue that it is the way in which demographic factors interact with other factors that is crucial, the two most relevant being education attainment and social status (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b).

Regarding cultural consumption in England, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007a) do not identify a social elite that is distinctive in consuming 'high' cultural forms while at the same time rejecting 'lower', or more popular, forms. Rather, the main axis of cultural stratification is one that separates cultural 'omnivores' from cultural 'univores'. They developed these different types of consumer in the visual arts further (2007b).

'Omnivores' have relatively high levels of consumption of all genres within a particular domain, 'paucivores' consume modest amounts within a limited range of possibilities and non-consumers or 'inactives' do not consume. They examine the social character of these types, noting that they are more strongly differentiated by status than class or income.

'Status' is described by Chan and Goldthorpe (2007a) as 'social honour' attached to certain personal attributes of an individual. 'Class' relates to the social relations in labour markets – a primary level of differentiation is that which sets apart employers, self-employed workers and employees. An individual can be regarded as having high status, yet have a relatively low income. For example, clergymen and academics have comparatively high status in relation to their income.

The probability of being an omnivore increases with social status and with level of education. Older people hold on average lower educational qualifications than younger adults, and the proportion of adults with higher education qualifications decreases further up the age cohort (Office for National Statistics 2005). Older women are considerably less likely to hold any educational qualifications than men. These patterns reflect significant social changes in the past century, including increased levels of participation in school and higher education among the whole population, and in the latter half of the twentieth century among women.

In addition, social and physical barriers have been identified as determinants of engagement (Keaney and Oskala 2007)¹. They found that a marked decline is visible in both arts attendance and participation from ages around 64, resulting in very low levels of engagement among the oldest age groups. Over 65, barriers to attendance are poor health, lack of social networks and transport - a significantly higher proportion of those aged 65 and over cite lack of company as their main barrier to attending than younger adults. Those aged 75 and over who are living

¹ A continuous survey commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport started in 2005 collecting information from 29,000 adults in England, UK.

alone are significantly less likely to have attended the arts than those living with other adults.

Lizardo (2006) notes that in addition to the traditional conception of cultural tastes (cultural capital) being determined by network relations (social capital), cultural tastes are used to form and sustain those networks. He hypothesises that the consumption of arts-related culture facilitates conversations necessary for acquaintances to develop into friendships. Using the distinction between two types of culture consumption ('highbrow' versus 'popular') and two types of network ties (strong and weak), he formulates a specific model of the conversion of cultural into social capital. He hypothesises that because popular culture has a broader distribution in social space, it tends to be associated with having connections that have a wider reach. Conversely, the consumption of more demanding and arcane forms of culture, because of its relatively stronger correlation with social status, is more likely to be used to sustain local connections that do not reach far in social space and that are therefore more likely to be strong ties.

Lizardo found that popular culture consumption has a positive effect on weak-tie network density but not strong-tie network density, while highbrow culture consumption selectively increases strong-tie density but has no appreciable effect on weak ties. Lizardo (2006, p.801) notes that consumption of highbrow culture is not likely to provide the individual with the type of cultural capital that can be used to create bridging social capital.

Consuming art as an older person is also related to how art shown in art galleries has changed. The media and modes of progressive arts practice over the last 50 years has changed enormously – conceptual art is not representational, and largely

does not consist of static pictures on walls. Therefore, 'culturally inactive' participants may find accessing contemporary art particularly challenging.

Reminiscence

Bluck and Levine's (1998) inclusive definition of reminiscence has been adopted in this paper: The salient features are that reminiscence happens to everyone in their everyday lives, that reminiscence can be wilfully recollected, and that memories are veridical. They note that memories are reconstructed in relation to existing schemas about the self, and vice versa.

Pasupathi describes the symbiotic relationship between reminiscence and the social context in which it occurs (Pasupathi, 2001). The social context influences the anticipated goal(s) of the narrator, and the aspects they select to be shared.

Implications can be drawn about the impact that the collective experience of sharing memories can have on participants in terms of wellbeing but it is unclear whether the positive effects are due to the increased social interaction, or the act of remembering the past (Haight, 1991). Older people have been shown to report positive emotions when reminiscing (Pasupathi & Cartensen, 2003). Sharing of autobiographical memories can develop, maintain, or disintegrate relationships with others.

Westerhof, Bohlmeijer and Webster (2010) discuss the different functions of reminiscence and their relationships with mental health and lifespan processes. Of the four types of reminiscence that relate to mental health, 'simple reminiscence' is the most relevant to this paper as it stimulates social reminiscence, bonding social capital and promotes positive feelings.

Research Purpose

The research set out to investigate how culturally inactive older people respond to galleries exhibiting contemporary visual art – how their existing social and cultural capital impacts on their experience and develops through engagement.

This group may be particularly vulnerable in terms of wellbeing, so more needs to be known about ways in which arts interventions can improve their lives. If, as Lizardo (2006) noted, cultural tastes (cultural capital) can form and sustain network relations (social capital), there may be implications for wellbeing as respondents with a wider range of social ties tend to exhibit better wellbeing (Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra 2011).

Methodology

Sample

In the larger study over 28 months, a sample of 56 participants were recruited with varying levels of cultural engagement. The focus of this article is on 19 participants who were 'culturally inactive'. These participants were drawn from categories of people identified as having lower rates of engagement with the arts, including men, those with a limiting disability, those suffering from illness, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BME), those in lower socio-economic groups and people living alone (Keaney & Oskala, 2007).

The following demographic information was gathered through baseline interviews.

The 'culturally inactive' participants were as follows:

Table I. Participant Demographics

Residential facility/arrangement	Gender and age range	Partner status
Sheltered accommodation unit	7 women Aged 62-90	5 widowed, 2 divorced
'Live at Home' scheme	8 men Aged 62-88	4 widowed, 4 married
BME – Chinese Community Association	1 male Aged 72	1 widowed
BME - voluntary group for Muslim women	2 women aged 63 and 68	1 widowed, 1 married
Isolated individual (contacted via adult services)	1 woman Aged 92	1 widowed

Data collection

Participants and group leaders (the warden from the sheltered accommodation unit and group leader from the 'Live at Home' scheme) were interviewed before the project, before and after each visit, a few months after the final visit and approximately two years after the final visit. The group leaders had been engaged with participants over the sub-project's duration. All interviews/focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Baseline interview questions

Before the visits took place, baseline interviews were conducted to get a sense of participants as individuals. This also had the aim of understanding the significance of culture engagement within wider context of participants' lives. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes/residential units in a one interviewer – one participant format. Participants from the 'Live at Home' scheme opted to be interviewed as a group. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Interviews gathered information about social networks (partner status, children, friends and associates), former occupation, education levels, living environment, politics, and personal interests.

Baseline questions related to social capital below:

Table 2. Questions relating to social capital

Could you describe your social relationships?
What kinds of relationships do you have with friends and family/how often do you see them? How near do you live to your family?
Who do you rely on in times of need? Who relies on you? Who provides you with emotional/physical support?
Do you like to do things alone? Or with other people?
What part do you play in your community? Is your community important to you? What would you describe as your community?

Visits

Participants made three visits in their groups to the same contemporary art galleries in the North East of England, UK. Participants were transported to and from the gallery in minibuses or taxis, accompanied by two researchers. The sheltered accommodation unit and the 'Live at Home' scheme participants were also

accompanied by their group leaders. One BME participant made his own way to and from the galleries, although transport was offered. The exhibitions discussed in this paper are *Knitted Lives* at the Shipley Art Gallery, *Chad McCail* at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

Pre-tour focus group interview

When participants arrived at the gallery they went for a pre-tour discussion facilitated by the main researcher with another researcher and group leaders from the residential facility/arrangement present (researchers were consistent across each group’s three visits). Whilst the focus of the interviews was on participants, group leaders were not prevented from contributing to discussions, and, where appropriate, the main researcher facilitated discussions. Gallery staff were not present. The group size (see Table 1) refers to the number of participants, and excludes the group leader and two researchers. Discussions were recorded and transcribed.

Pre-tour focus group interview questions are given in Table 3:

Table 3. Pre-tour questions

Pre-tour questions
What are you expecting to see/get out of the exhibition?
Have you visited this art gallery before? Do you visit art galleries? If so, why?
Pre-visit questions asked on second and third visit
Do you remember what you saw last visit?
Have you reflected on ‘x’ exhibition? In what ways?
Did you tell anyone about the exhibition?

Gallery tour

The format of the visits modelled a typical facilitated group visit, in an attempt to replicate normal gallery education models. Participants were given a tour of the exhibitions by gallery education staff lasting 45 minutes which involved focusing on key works and ended with an opportunity to ask questions. During the tour elders commented to one another and asked art-related questions of the guide that were answered in the gallery. The two researchers and group leaders accompanied participants on their tour of the exhibition.

Post-tour focus group discussion

This followed the same format and involved the same researchers as the pre-visit focus group discussion. The discussions aimed to gauge participants’ reactions to the art in order to understand art engagement and interpersonal engagement (e.g., cultural and social capital). Discussions were not rigidly structured and participants were able to discuss aspects of the visit that interested them.

Examples of the questions asked about the visits/art and follow-up interviews are given subsequently (Tables 4-6). Follow-up interviews were conducted in the residential facility/arrangement a few months and two years after the visits by the main researcher. Interviews were conducted separately with the group leaders. Participants were interviewed as a group, although they were offered the option of being interviewed one-to-one (Tables 4-6).

Table 4. Post-visit questions

Table 4. Post-visit questions

What did you think of that exhibition?
What did it make you feel? Likes/dislikes?

Will you tell anyone about today's visit?
Would you come back again?
How could this art gallery improve services for older people?

Table 5. Follow-up questions for participants

Do you remember anything about the visits?
Did it develop your knowledge about art?
How did the visits differ from other activities?
What was it like doing it as part of a group?
Did it change your relationships with anyone?

Table 6. Follow-up questions for group leaders

What impact did the visits have on the group? long term? Have participants talked about the visits?
Did the discussions afterwards make a difference?
Did the visits develop any relationships within the group?
Did the visits change your relationship with the group?
Did it develop participants' knowledge about art?
Have you been back to the art galleries/further work?
How did the visits differ to other activities?

Data analysis

A constant comparison process of analysis was adopted (Glaser and Strauss 1967). To interpret the data, the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts, gradually identifying key categories and connections. A systematic method of analysis was adopted, which involved coding the data (Denscombe 2003). At the initial phase of analysis, the categories were subject to a continual process of refinement. As various categories emerged from the early consideration of the data,

the author returned to the field to check their validity against 'reality' (Denscombe 2003). The categories discussed in this paper are:

- networks prior to engagement, development of relationships (bonding, bridging and linking);
- prior experience and education, developments in knowledge and understanding, changes in affect, changes in behaviour, changes in confidence.

Through the process of reflection on the categories, the author developed a set of themes and relationships. Emerging from these categories were two themes – social and cultural capital. Both social and cultural capital have been used as themes before in previous research projects and have been reported elsewhere. Shifts in these themes were identified as part of the analysis. Spontaneous reminiscence emerged as a functional part of participants' discussion that appeared to facilitate shifts in social and cultural capital.

In the discussion that follows the shifts in social and cultural capital are interwoven. The structured narrative approach seems appropriate to the presentation of findings from a qualitative study such as this. The narrative presents general shifts across the whole group, but also an account of a hard to reach individual's responses. It would seem important to include both these when analysing evidence from a sample of this size and nature, so that not only general patterns but also individual needs can be identified.

Results and discussion

Relationship between participants' social capital, cultural capital and initial engagement

Before taking part in the research project, gatekeepers such as wardens from the sheltered accommodation unit, charity facilitators and social workers were vital in encouraging participants to take part. Three participants from the sheltered accommodation unit noted how they would not have visited on their own. Three participants were reluctant to visit, stating that they did not feel intelligent enough to contribute. The participants had fewer years of education than the 'culturally omnivorous' participants from the larger study. Three gained qualifications that are the equivalent of graduating from high school in the US at the age of 16. The other 16 participants had attended school up to the ages of 16, but did not gain any qualifications.

Patterns of attendance had changed throughout participants' lives, some noting how they used to enjoy visiting art galleries. However, all participants commented that they did not have an interest in or knowledge of contemporary art – before the visit only one participant had visited the Baltic before.

The participants from the sheltered accommodation unit made their first visit to the Baltic. The gallery was converted from a disused flour mill in 2002, a significant part of the quayside's regeneration. The participants from the sheltered accommodation unit discussed how the industrial character of the area had changed and one explained why this made her feel excluded:

Emily: This quayside now has all gone upmarket ...the flour mill was a working mill...they've taken it all away...I feel out of me depth. Down here is not for the likes of me.

Warden: What stops you from going into that building? Is it just because of your age or is it because in your head, you feel you are not welcome?...like Michelle, like your mam and dad when they were alive...it wouldn't have been for a woman to go into a pub, it was unheard of so what's happening now is just and everything's evolved (pre-tour - first visit).

The warden challenges the participant's preconceptions, suggesting that the psychosocial barriers may be self-imposed and therefore unfounded. Within the particular context of non-visitors feeling excluded by a new contemporary art gallery, the group discussion around urban regeneration seems an important way of acknowledging the industrial past, whilst also embracing new opportunities. The bridging relationship with the warden shapes the participant's experience, developing her initial confidence which has the potential to enable her to develop her cultural capital.

Content of particular exhibitions prompting group reminiscence – a stage in the development of cultural capital

Participants from the sheltered accommodation unit made their second visit to *Knitted Lives*, five months into the project. The specific reason they gave for enjoying the exhibition was that the art enabled them to reminisce, participants describing it as 'marvellous', 'fantastic', as it, 'brought something back to me' and 'I

can relive those days'. In this case reminiscence stimulated positive emotions (Pasupathi & Cartensen 2003). In response to the artworks, the participants discussed how they and their mothers had made rugs out of scrap material:

Ruth: ...she used to make new ones and they used to be rolled up in the corner and many a time it went on the bed.

Jane: She often sent me-

Margaret: -Lasted for ever.

Jane: "Ask her if she's got a piece of something red to cut up, I'm making a flower and I haven't got a red flower", and, "has she got a bit of green for to make the leaf that me mam can cut up, sommat red, sommat green?"

Ruth: She used to draw patterns on with a bit chalk, different colours and she used to, she was quite good mind, she used to sort the colours...(second visit).

Because the exhibits were created by women of a similar age to the participants, who were also living in the region, there was recognition of their shared experiences. These discussions seemed to be an example of reminiscence as opposed to a conversation as participants were discussing at length, in animated detail, the processes they had gone through in the past when doing domestic tasks with their mothers, enacting some of the movements as they spoke – this suggested that the memories were veridical and that participants were experiencing fond emotions as

they recalled them. Here the memories are being wilfully recollected (Bluck and Levine, 1998) are socially constructed (Pasupathi 2001), and appear positive, as opposed to dysfunctional (Westerhof, Bohlmeijer and Webster 2010, p715). In describing their prior personal engagements in similar domestic tasks to the researcher, the participants could be seen to be reminiscing to teach others (Webster 1998), potentially developing linking social capital.

The same exhibition encouraged participants to use former skills. One participant, aged 82, noted how she had given up knitting since moving into the sheltered accommodation unit and having a stroke. Despite feeling that she could not knit well any longer, as part of the exhibition there was an area where visitors could knit, and she successfully completed a few lines. With the encouragement of the warden, participants also discussed setting up a knitting group, again strengthening both bonding and bridging relationships.

As part of the same visit participants noted how they found discussing traumatic events beneficial. The participants discussed a contemporary quilt with an abstract design, *Mountain Rescue Helicopter Gunship* (1992), made by Dinah Prentice. One participant criticised the quilt because the title bore no obvious relationship to the design:

Helen: It didn't even look like a helicopter, did it? Well, I got nothing from it.

In response to her criticism of the quilt, another participant disagreed:

Jane: ..I've been out in the streets when you've seen the bombs coming down and you've had to dive in the first door you could go in...so I can go along with that I'm afraid.

Here Jane relates the mountain rescue scene to her experience of bombing raids in the Second World War. The warden questioned whether it had been seeing the painting that had prompted that memory:

Jane: Yes, because that's when you heard it and you could tell a German plane by the noise.

Here the participants go beyond using the art as a stimulus for reminiscence – on their second visit they are starting to discuss feelings evoked by abstract designs and contest each other's interpretations. Debating in this way an important development because whilst participants seemed to be enjoying reminiscence stimulated by the art, reflecting on contemporary ideas presented in the art may be more constructive. Creating new interpretations rather than focusing on the past echoes Ann Basting's *Timeslips* approach which uses images as stimulus for creating a collective story with people with dementia.²

It was notable how exhibitions which facilitated group reminiscence generated positive feelings. Two years after the visits, the participants were able to recount the works of art they had seen in detail – the discussions were extremely animated, and participants noted how much they had enjoyed the art. Personal reminiscence appears to be a stage an inexperienced viewer passes through on the way to learning how to discuss art within its wider social context.

Developments in social and cultural capital for one participant

² <http://www.timeslips.org/>

The following section focuses on the participant from the sheltered accommodation unit who had disagreed with the other members in the previous section. This focus is an attempt to examine the visits within the wider context of an individual's life. For this participant, her changing relationships seem to be intertwined with growing art understanding, suggesting developments in social and cultural capital. In the baseline interviews, the participant, aged 68, discussed how she had found moving to the sheltered accommodation unit:

Helen: I'm quite a newcomer here and when I first came I found it very difficult to settle. I could think to myself what am I doing in a place like this? Because you know there's quite a lot of old people.

She discussed what she felt about life and ageing, and returned to feelings of loneliness several times through the interview:

...I get lonely now I must admit because I've always had such a busy life. I find sometimes I'm...sitting talking to the walls... I have a couple of good friends in here but a lot of them are just more or less "hello" and "how are you doing?" ...but I do have two good friends in here...I find being lonely...really bad.

It was notable that the participant was quite independent from the other members of the group during the visits – she was openly critical of Dinah Prentice's quilt because the title bore no obvious relationship to the design. However, she enjoyed the *Knitted Lives* exhibition and described how she thought the artists had constructed the artworks:

...you'd look at that hammer then you'd work it, Mary will know I mean because she's a knitter...(second visit).

Significantly, she praises another participant's skills as a knitter, potentially developing bonding social capital.

During the final interview after the final visit, unprompted, she changed her opinion, stating that she had liked Dinah Prentice's quilt. The participant may have been motivated to change her opinion or have appeared to change her opinion to align herself with the other members of the group, not necessarily a positive development. It may also relate to pre-conceptions regarding feelings of exclusion; that there is a correct interpretation of artworks not open to multiple interpretations. However, it could be that in developing her knowledge and understanding about contemporary art (cultural capital) through the three visits, she is starting to gain a wider understanding of non-representational art forms. After the third visit, she is beginning to understand how abstraction or symbolism, as well as literal representation could be used to convey meaning. In the following extract the participant described the symbolism behind a Chad McCail piece *Monoculture* (2010), bringing in references to George Orwell's literary depictions of totalitarian states:

Helen: The red they were full of life when they started and as they got through the system they were slowly changing into black, that means they were getting more downtrodden...He was very much into... *1984* (Third visit).

The participant also displays signs of bonding with other members of the group - sharing information about the artist she has researched in her free time and making a joke:

Jane, you would have had a fit if you had seen some of the things that he has made because there's very much a sexual thing going through...his paintings.

The warden noted significant behavioural and attitudinal changes in her across the course of the three visits:

-the difference in her understanding and appreciation. The first visit she was very negative about contemporary art...then she goes to this one and...said how much she'd enjoyed it...to turn round...and say, "I would look forward to going," and she even looked him up on the internet, that's how interested she was...it's quite gratifying in a sense that you can see that you've helped somebody to find something they've done themselves (Follow-up interview – one month).

There seems to have been an increase in both the participant's cultural and social capital. In the interviews held two years after the final visit, the warden noted how joining in with the visits integrated the participant into the group as, 'the group got to know her in a different light...they became more wanting to share things with her'. The other participants agreed with this. The warden also noted that she continues to visit the art galleries independently.

Differences between the group and individual experience

The 'isolated' participant who visited alone and the BME participant who visited with his daughter were not able to benefit from group discussions. However, the visit was still a sociable experience as they were given a guided tour and were accompanied by two researchers. Also, they engaged in pre-visit and post-visit discussions with the researchers. Their responses to the visits were positive, the isolated participant noted that she appreciated a meaningful activity that got her thinking about other points of view. However, it is notable that she dropped out of the project after two visits. Visiting as part of a group may have encouraged this isolated participant's further participation.

Developments in social and cultural capital – two years on

In the final post-visit focus group interviews, participants commented on enjoying the social stimulation of the discussions. A 75 year old widower from the 'Live at Home' scheme noted the advantage of coming as an organised group and having a facilitated tour:

Well this is better because we get told what's what...but if you come on your own...nobody tells you anything (Third visit).

A 64 year old from the scheme noted how important the discussions had been, despite not necessarily liking the art:

But we never had the opportunity before to sit down and discuss and create and I think that's what's really good about this is having even if we didn't like what we'd seen the chance to...discuss things together (Third visit).

Significantly, he views the discussion as part of a 'creative' process.

Two years after the visits, one participant from the sheltered accommodation unit noted how she felt more confident in asking questions, suggesting psychosocial barriers had been reduced:

Jane: Before I would have just walked out if I was on my own. Now I would ask. Sometimes you feel stupid asking...You think, I'm ignorant (Follow-up – Two years).

Two years after the visits, both the warden and the 'Live at Home' leader noted that participants still discussed the visits. The warden noted how participants called themselves the 'art group', and had met informally in between visits to discuss the artwork. She described how this shared interest had brought them together as friends and encouraged further participation in activities:

The group became quite close. After that it was the same ones who put themselves forward because they'd gained so much from that initial one and they realised that they weren't being judged on what they did or didn't know, it was just a completely new experience for them. They found they wanted to go out there and do it again to take the chance to do something different that they wouldn't have done if they hadn't done the first (Follow-up – Two years).

The 'Live at Home' leader noted the importance of the discussions:

The most positive thing of the whole exercise was the opportunity to have those discussions because I think they were full discussions and that really impressed me, the way all the guys...were happy to talk... They wouldn't have had that type of discussion in the other places. We subsequently went to the Laing Art Gallery and we had a new volunteer with us and he was really struck by the fact that these blokes were standing in the middle of an art gallery having a discussion about what they were looking at... It wasn't just walking around on their own...and then moving on (Follow-up – Two years).

The discussions during the subsequent visit suggest developments in both participants' cultural and social capital. The leader noted that in discussions during other activities run by the scheme not everybody contributes. He commented on whether the visits had changed relationships amongst the men:

Definitely, I think they felt they were special that they were doing this and...they could relate to those people when they saw them either in the street or subsequently when they saw the group.

He noted how his own relationship with them changed:

I felt a lot closer to those particular guys – we just had another level which the other guys who didn't come to the exhibitions didn't have.

Such interventions have the potential to develop different types of social capital as discussions cemented bonding relationships with other members of the group and

developed bridging relationships with the warden and group leader. In terms of linking social capital that developed, one of the art galleries ran a series of workshops for the sheltered accommodation unit. The research team are still in contact with participants, some of whom have become a reference group for further research. Two years after the final visit, the research team facilitated access for two of the groups to apply for funding. The linking relationships have the potential to enable participants to access new resources, developing the wider social ties that have been shown to be important in relation to wellbeing (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004, Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011). The data contradicts Lizardo's (2006) findings that consumption of highbrow culture is not likely to provide the individual with the type of cultural capital that can be used to create bridging connections. Once initial psychosocial barriers had been reduced, contemporary art became a 'non-specialised' art form that participants were able to assimilate into everyday conversations.

Limitations

This paper's focus on the 19 'culturally inactive' participants means that results may not be generalizable - the paper does not report on culturally omnivorous people.

Also, there was only one 'isolated' participant.

The sub-project involved 5 groups ranging in size from 1-8 (the group number size denoted in table 1 excludes the two researchers and group leader). How the different group sizes influenced the outcomes could be more systematically tested.

The art may have stimulated participants to discuss past events collectively, solely because they had all experienced them. However, the fact that the conversations

involved accessing personal details and were particularly animated, suggests a level of engagement that may strengthen bonding social capital. Also, if it is the reminiscence that is significant to wellbeing, then there are multiple activities that can elicit reminiscence.

It is important not to overstate the significance of three visits to art galleries within the larger context of an individual's life. Also, visiting art galleries is only one of many possible ways of engendering social capital. Further evidence about the distinct contribution of different art forms to social capital and how this relates to wellbeing is needed.

Implications

Interaction between social and cultural capital needs to be supplemented with reminiscence effects when considering engaging culturally inactive older people. Participants' existing social and cultural capital impacted on their initial engagement and continued to interrelate and develop throughout the three visits. Reminiscence seemed to be a phase that the inexperienced viewers passed through on the way to learning to discuss art within its wider social context. Future research could investigate how reminiscence can be used in contemporary art interventions.

Reminiscence stimulated by the art seemed to be the common ground that helped participants decode the art, significantly reducing psychosocial barriers to access. Gallery educators can draw from participants' experience to help facilitate the sharing of spontaneous reminiscence. Opportunities for reminiscence may not be immediately apparent in all contemporary art; so, gallery educators need to find imaginative ways to relate content to participants' lives. While this is an effective

way of initially increasing confidence, progression would be enabled by moving participants to develop wider interpretation strategies. After only three visits participants were beginning to analyse the works of art in different ways, developing their knowledge and understanding of contemporary arts practice and its surrounding discourses (that is, developing their cultural capital). Equally, gallery educators can gradually introduce more challenging contemporary art as participants' cultural capital develops. Research by MacPherson, Bird, Anderson, Davis and Blair (2010) into an art gallery programme for people with dementia found that whilst education staff initially selected straightforward works to prompt discussion, they soon found that abstract works were acceptable.

The conversations about the art developed bonding, bridging and linking social capital, developing the wider network ties that have been shown to contribute to people's wellbeing (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra 2011). This is important as aging typically involves profound challenges to social connectedness, such as retirement and bereavement (Cornwell and Waite 2009). Such interventions could help participants who have recently moved into care homes/sheltered accommodation to bond with both carers and other residents, allowing them to assimilate former identity and experiences into their new environment. Linking relationships with arts educators could help older people access opportunities.

It is unlikely that simply viewing an art exhibit would lead to enhanced wellbeing. Whilst the need for discussion is true of all age groups who are not familiar with contemporary art and art galleries, the post-visit discussion seems a crucial component of cultural engagement for this population. Discussions can function to reduce psychosocial barriers to inclusion, particularly relevant for older people when

considering the extent to which arts practice has changed within the last 50 years. Culturally inactive older people will have not experienced contemporary art through visits with school and may feel that it is too far removed from their concept of art.

More work is needed on how these bonding, bridging and linking relationships affect wellbeing over the long term. Feedback from the warden, group leader and participants two years after completion suggests that the positive emotions from the experience were long lasting.

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