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Article abstract

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MÉMOIRES DU LIVRE
STUDIES IN BOOK CULTURE

CULTURAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY CITY-WIDE READING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

There are currently more than 500 city-wide reading projects in the US, and dozens in Canada and the UK. Through creative and traditional programming, such as canoe treks and book discussion groups, producers often use the One Book, One City model to "create community" through a selected text. This essay argues that instances of coming together to share reading experiences can be considered literary cultural fields as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu conceived them. Readers seek cultural capital by participating in events because participation in book culture is considered a commendable and valuable activity. However, in order to participate, one needs to already have a certain amount of cultural literacy and capital. The essay offers an analysis of readers' articulations of why they do and do not participate in city-wide book programming to help us better understand the motivations, pleasures and obstacles of membership in ephemeral reading communities.

RÉSUMÉ

Il existe actuellement plus de 500 projets de lecture « urbains » aux États-Unis, et des dizaines au Canada et au Royaume-Uni. Par l'entremise d'une programmation tantôt traditionnelle, tantôt novatrice, s'articulant autour, par exemple, de sorties en canoë ou de groupes de discussion, les organisateurs se basent souvent sur le principe « un livre, une ville » pour créer une communauté autour d'un texte choisi. Cet article soutient que de se réunir pour partager des expériences de lecture appartient au champ culturel tel que le conçoit Bourdieu. Les lecteurs chercheraient en effet à acquérir du capital culturel en participant à diverses activités, puisque le fait de s'intéresser à la culture du livre est valorisé. Toutefois, avant de prendre part à celles-ci, il faut déjà posséder un certain bagage littéraire et culturel. L'article analyse les raisons pour lesquelles les lecteurs participent ou ne participent pas aux activités évoquées, afin de mieux saisir l'attrait et les obstacles liés au fait d'adhérer à une communauté de lecteurs éphémère.

Nancy Pearl, the librarian rock star of the US literary world, and her colleague, Chris Higashi, created a city-wide reading program called *If All of Seattle Read the Same Book* in 1998. The Chicago Public Library followed several years later with a twice-yearly program it calls *One Book, One Chicago*. Since then, more than 500 programs have followed with a model that Pearl and Higashi originally designed, based on Seattle Public Library's successful relationship with 70 book clubs. There are currently at least a dozen Canadian cities hosting a One Book, One Community (OBOC) program[1] and several in the UK[2].

Usually, but not always, the programs are organized by small committees of librarians. In some instances, the committee members include people from other agencies with literacy agendas. For example, in Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge, Ontario, the committee consists of representatives of the local libraries, a bookstore owner, a scholarly journal editor and a city politician. By contrast, in Huntsville, Alabama, a committee of three librarians executes the month-long activities. Seattle's program is largely a two-woman production. 'The Big Read,' a program organized by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the USA which, since 2006, has made over 800 grants to support One Book-modeled community-wide reading projects, encourages programming committees to form alliances across agencies not only for a better distribution of labour, but also to increase opportunities for funding.

The American Library Association's 'Planning Your Community-Wide Read' guide[3] notes that choosing a book for the program is the most important endeavour of the programming process. It is as they write, 'the heart' of the project. On the surface, it appears that books are selected based on social themes, characters or settings relevant to the city or region. In reality, programming committees have to consider a myriad of factors in selecting the *one book*: the availability and discount pricing provided by the publisher; accessibility of the book across reading levels; the 'discussability' of the book (Taylor 26); and, an author's ability to provide in-person readings and to attend other events. Not always is a living author important to the book selection committee, which can be comprised of the programming members, an advisory board or the general public (through polls or voting). Now in its fourth year, the Big Read program provides participants with programming support of one of twenty-two books, many

of which could be considered part of the traditional American canon, and their authors long gone.[4] Big Read participants have access to a centrally produced reading guide and to reading events, such as panel discussions after a film showing or traditional book group discussions.

Through conventional programming and creative activities, such as canoe treks or cooking classes based on a book's theme, producers often use the OBOC model to "create community" through a selected text. The ambitions might be as grand as those promoted on the *One Book, One Chicago* website:

> [The] One Book, One Chicago program is launched each spring and fall to cultivate a culture of reading and discussion in Chicago by *bringing our diverse city together around one great book* [emphasis added]. Reading great literature provokes us to think about ourselves, our environment and our relationships. Talking about great literature with friends, families and neighbors often adds richness and depth to the experience of reading.[5]

The organizers might also be more down-to-earth about the ephemeral nature of community that is formed around book discussion in city-wide programs. For instance, one librarian in Huntsville, Alabama, said in an interview: "We read the same book; we're sitting in the same room together; I've never met you before. I may never see you again in my life, but here we have this great connection for an hour, an hour-and-a-half".[6]

These comments invite us to ask at least two questions. What skills does one need to be able to "connect" with other readers? Indeed, why would a reader want to talk about a book with complete strangers? Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that readers either want to share their interpretations with others or they find the interpretive process is much too private to share with others (Rehberg Sedo "Readers" 79; "Badges"109-117). In this essay, I examine and expand upon this preliminary conclusion, using data that was collected as part of a three-year international research project that investigated contemporary reading practices. I found that readers seek both cultural capital *and* community by participating in city-wide reading programs. Following the theme of this special issue of *MduL/SBC* entitled *Book Networks and Cultural Capital: Space, Society & the Nation,* I use data from 34 focus group interviews, 9 OBOC producer

interviews and more than 1000 survey participants of readers in Canada, the US and the UK collected through the Beyond the Book research project.[7]

This essay argues that readers seek cultural capital by participating in city-wide reading programs because participation in book culture is still considered a commendable and valuable way to spend time. Readers might find great pleasure in experiencing the selected text(s) with others in their community, but that pleasure is wrapped up in the idea of connecting with others who share the same cultural status. In order to participate, a reader needs to already have a certain amount of cultural literacy and capital. First, to analyse shared reading as a social practice, I provide a brief synopsis of relevant extant book club literature. Book historians provide the necessary contextual background on book clubs, reading groups, and literary societies. Not only is the OBOC model born of book clubs, but also many of the participants in public events are already part of private book clubs. To move from the symbolic and physical space of intimate book clubs to the larger, public spaces of OBOC, I use the critical lens that Pierre Bourdieu provided in his work on literary cultural field theory in *The Field of Cultural Production*. I argue that shared reading practices and programs change how we understand the literary cultural field because of the different contemporary actors and aspects involved in the phenomenon. While Bourdieu did not consider mass reading projects, field theory provides a flexible framework through which book historians and cultural analysts can interrogate the city-wide reading program. I then analyse readers' articulations of why they do and do not participate in city-wide book programming to better understand the motivations and pleasures of, and obstacles to, membership in ephemeral reading communities. The analysis extends Bourdieu's field to include readers themselves. Especially important is how the readers in the study articulate cultural capital. I end the essay with a discussion, based on the readers' discussions of their own pleasure reading, of some of the obstacles to "creating community" through city-wide reading programs.

A brief introduction to collective reading practices

The burgeoning area of book club and reading group study illustrates the diversity of contemporary manifestations of shared reading practices, and informs any study of collective reading practices, whether the reading takes place in public or private settings. Jenny Hartley (2001) and Sarah Turvey

were two of the first scholars to pose general questions directly to contemporary book club members. Hailing the rise in popularity and significance of the clubs as, in their phrase, 'the reading-group movement,' Hartley's *Reading Groups* provides general information that forms a useful background for an understanding of the cultural, social and educational roles book clubs have played in the last thirty to forty years.

First, Hartley finds that book clubs are comprised primarily of middle-class, well-educated women predominantly over the age of forty. Not surprisingly, considering that social theorists have argued that education and work play a significant role in valuing books and reading[8], most club members are highly educated. Secondly, readers report that the search for new knowledge is often a key reason for joining and belonging to a club (Hartley 44-45). They are looking for points of view that differ from their own, and these are made available to them through the varying interpretations and opinions members express when books are being discussed. Thirdly, book clubs read primarily fiction.

Of course, by describing book clubs in this general manner we ignore complexities that are intrinsic to any human relationship, as well as any relationship between a reader and his or her books. Book historians have been careful to identify the multitude of ways shared reading practices can be evaluated as both a form and practice of social relationships. We now know that throughout the Middle Ages, the practice of gathering together to read or listen to someone read from a text grew in popularity and eventually became commonplace. Though illiteracy was the norm and few people owned books, travelling entertainers and troubadours roamed the countryside reading out loud to those who wanted to listen. In the homes of the privileged minority, educated servants read to their masters. The gatherings were frequently efficacious; often, labour of some sort was being performed while, or before, the reader read from the book.

By the late eighteenth century, the members of small "book societies," "reading societies," "book clubs," and "literary societies" were discussing books and socializing while the group also acted as a lending and circulating library (StClair 254). Some of the groups had women members, but it was not until the early 1800s that women started forming literary societies in any great numbers for the purpose of discussing books, and it was only after the

Civil War that the movement took hold in the United States. As more middle-class women gained leisure time due to the changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution, they gathered to practice religion, and then slowly, they were able to gain access to public spaces that were traditionally privy only to men. As Thomas Augst has illustrated, for example, gender, class and race were often barriers to education, but through libraries, books and knowledge were useful in institutionalizing a more democratic print culture (5-22).

Nineteenth-century literary societies were the descendants of the seventeenth-century European salons, which were the gathering spots for those (mainly) men who wanted to discuss literature, politics or culture. But the membership of these North American "literary societies" was comprised mainly of white females and in practice they were modeled after familial reading sessions that took place in some homes, in which books or magazines were read and discussed, for either educational and entertainment purposes (Price and Smith 6; Hedrick 73-123; Sicherman). There is also evidence of mixed-gender African-American literary societies, whose members read to and for one another (Zboray and Saracino Zboray 129-131; McHenry). These readers sought not leisure, but to gain cultural capital in an increasingly literate society. As education improved and literacy spread, the members of literary societies came more often than not from the burgeoning middle class.[9] Ann Ruggles Gere estimates that by the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than two million American women in literary societies (273), and Barbara Sicherman estimates that seventy-five percent of U.S. public libraries were founded by these types of women's groups (209).

Reading communities often exposed their members to learning opportunities that were not available within the institutionalized education system (McHenry *Forgotten Readers*, Rehberg Sedo "Reading and Study Groups"). In the early part of the century, formal study groups established by universities, government agencies and religious institutions reflected the growing momentum of the adult education movement, which had began in the late 1870s and which continued well into the middle of the twentieth century.[10]

By the 1960s, formal study clubs had largely disappeared. The semi-formal groups that may have branched off from institutions ceded to less formal groups that began with readers already loosely affiliated to one another, perhaps by geographic proximity or through a social network resulting from, for example, a self-help group or activist circle. The political and cultural complexities of these groups are especially evident in the oral histories of the private women's reading clubs that emerged in the 1960s and 70s. These clubs followed the model of the Chautauqua and the NHRU reading circles in that the members often met in each other's homes, but differed from those groups in that their membership consisted mainly of women whose socio-economic backgrounds and educational experiences closely resembled one another, and who lived in the same neighbourhood and had reached a similar stage of life (Rehberg Sedo *Badges)*.

Patricia Gregory's comparative analysis of historical and contemporary book clubs in St. Louis, Missouri explores the social bonds that are formed over time when readers read together for many years, and argues that communal reading is a cultural process that can become a ritual for group members. Her work invites the question of what happens to the process when the community is ephemeral instead of given the opportunity to create its own culture over sustained time. Michelle Winter Sisson's discussion of the educational potential of book clubs suggests that in the African-American book club she studied the women read differently as individuals and as a community. Identifying the process and place between private and social reading as 'the grafted space,' Jen Pecoskie presents an original contribution to the understanding of how social factors influence private processes, and vice versa, when readers read. Similarly, Elizabeth Long's analysis is especially important to this analysis of community reading events because it questions the distinction between public and private reading practices while providing opportunities to critically assess the "moral and ideological dimensions of social identity" (34). Long persuasively argues that an individual's participation in a book club is based on a *shared* need that informs the individual's sense of identity, and contributes to the group's solidarity. I argue that these needs play out in interesting ways that tell us how *distinction* and taste hierarchies look in contemporary print culture.

Cultural capital, cultural literacy and contemporary readers

In his useful article titled "Watching *The Big Read* with Pierre Bourdieu," David Wright provides a strong argument for using Bourdieu's model of the "literary field" even though today's national print cultures are quite different from XIXth century France and its particular literary field (5-8). Highlighting the western media's role in the popularization of literature, Wright calls to our attention not only the economic implications of programs such as *Oprah's Book Club*, but also the cultural policy links of One Book, One City programs, which are often produced by state institutions, such as libraries (9-18).[11] These programs often involve the collaboration of various agents within a traditional literary field, including authors, publishers, booksellers, and schools, but should—I would argue—also include readers, libraries and librarians, media networks, and even coffee shops and weapon-manufacturing companies.[12] As Wright rightfully argues, in institutionally supported reading programs, "the media and policy fields act as arbiters for the allocation of symbolic capital" (19). Motivating the different actors involved in the programs are not only the economic benefits, but also the belief that "'culture' can do civic work and contribute to social goods" (5).

As both Beth Driscoll and Wright argue, Bourdieu's (2003) social model of "literary field" situates cultural production within the larger social space and within the field of power. Bourdieu sees two opposite ends, or two poles of power: autonomy and heteronomy. The autonomic pole is comprised of those who have earned cultural and symbolic power, and see themselves free of economic strings, while the heteronomic pole is made up of those who have both political and economic power. Historically, we can think of the autonomous pole with authors such as Flaubert and Manet, who wrote for a specific readership. A more contemporary illustration might be *Corrections* author Jonathan Franzen.

The public high/popular cultural debate that took place in the popular press after author Jonathan Franzen was invited—and then uninvited— to *Oprah's Book Club* to discuss his novel illustrates the uneasy result of new actors in the literary cultural field. The now infamous saga begins with a 1996 *Harper's* article in which Franzen bemoans the massification of literature. He writes: "There has never been much love lost between the

world of art and the 'value-neutral' ideology of the market economy. In the wake of the Cold War, this ideology has set about consolidating its gains, enlarging its markets, securing its profits, and demoralizing its few remaining critics" (38). Refusing to appear on the popular daytime television book club segment of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to discuss his novel in 2002, Franzen accused *Oprah's Book Club* as being a "promotional vehicle for schmaltzy, one-dimensional novels" (Kirkpatrick). Later, he tried to back track on (US) National Public Radio, saying "I feel like I'm solidly in the high-art literary tradition, but I like to read entertaining books and this maybe helps bridge that gap, but it also heightens these feelings of being misunderstood" (Kirkpatrick).

Autonomy assumes that cultural producers produce for other cultural producers, or at least for people with the same amount of symbolic and cultural capital. Autonomy equals high symbolic power in the field, and also assumes a dismissal of heteronomic cultural participants, or more frankly, those with economic power. The heteronomic end of the pole is made up of those who have both political and economic power, but low symbolic power. Within the field of cultural production, then, those on the heteronomic end of the pole discredit those with autonomy with dominant discourse outside of the field of cultural production. Thinking of the example of Franzen and Winfrey, we note that his reactions, and Winfrey's subsequent decisions to withdraw the invitation and then discontinue her hugely successful club, re-ignited debates around literary and cultural classifications in both popular and scholarly media. Those with high symbolic power in the field disavow the heteronomic cultural workers with dismissal of their economic power.

This framing works well if we consider that cultural hierarchies tend to deem television as popular culture and literature as high culture, but what happens when we consider OBOC programs that are delivered in spaces that are usually created for the people, or rather, the masses?

In their *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu,* Harker, Mahar and Wilkes demonstrate Bourdieu's wide-ranging definition of "cultural capital." They make a point that it:

> …includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant

> attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns)… For Bourdieu, *capital acts as a social relation within* [emphasis added] a system of exchange, and the term is extended to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation.
>
> 1

Taken in the literal sense, the notion that "capital acts as a social relation" foregrounds the importance of considering the kind of participation community-wide book events enable. In addition to joining others "to learn new things," which is a popular reason for people to join book clubs (Hartley 128-133, Rehberg Sedo *Badges* 96), gathering with other readers to respond to a book could be interpreted as a form of resistance to the historical privileging of solitary reading within the academy. It might also, however, be a way to gain cultural capital in a society that places high value on literature.

Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital is not a fixed concept, within or across fields. While a reader might have capital within a city-wide book discussion group because she appears knowledgeable about the classics, for example, that same knowledge might constitute negative capital in her book club that prefers reading contemporary best sellers. Reading "the classics" and literature, in general, is deemed a worthy leisure pursuit because reading within North America and the UK is inscribed as having moral and "civilizing" purposes and effects (Black 42, 87; Black and Muddiman 41; DCMS 21-43; Fuller Listening 15; Reading 212; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 30; Hand 370; Peck 120, 164, 181; Wright 16-17). Partly because they are the products of educational systems that promote these meanings of reading, readers who participate in OBOC events idealize the accumulation of cultural capital they may achieve in this arena. Of those OBOC readers who responded to our survey, 75% have completed an undergraduate or graduate degree. They recognize the symbolic value placed on reading. The readers think the cultural capital available to them through book programming will benefit them in other cultural fields.

This is not to say that gaining cultural capital is the only perceived benefit of participating in the programming. When we asked our survey participants to tell us why they participate in the program, the highest response at 34% was that it "enriches the private reading experience." This was followed by 16% of the readers using the book programs to "assist in book choice." The wide difference can begin to point to the interrelationship between the field of cultural production and cultural consumption. Consider the idea of pleasure in shared reading. For the readers in our study, the pleasures of reading are often several things at once. Shared reading can be educational; it can help one to understand the "Other"; it can be affective engagement with characters, issues or places; and, it can provide readers opportunities to feel part of a community. In our focus groups, we consistently heard responses that illustrate this complexity. For example, one of our questions across all the sites was, "What does OBOC achieve?" Very tellingly, Greg, a middle-class white professional and one of our *One Book, One Chicago* focus group participants said: "I think [it] make[s] people think about cultures outside of yourself. I mean if we look at even *A Raisin in the Sun,* everything is trying to get you to think outside of yourself, you know, trying to look at other sides of the coin" (26 October 2005). This reader finds the shared reading an opportunity to learn something new, and potentially to empathize with the "Other." He enjoys the intellectual challenge inherent in "trying to look at the other side of the coin." Just as many of the OBOC producers articulate, this reader sees shared reading as a way to better understand one another.

Michael, another Chicago reader but one who does not participate in the city-wide program, compares *One Book, One Chicago* to the "Great Books program for the masses" (22 October 2005). He told us that he thinks "reading for the most part is traditionally [a] middle-upper or middle class [activity], [or at least, it is]… pitched that way." Michael surmised that the purpose of *One Book, One Chicago* is to try to create cultural capital and community. He said: "It's something to bridge across the classes, I think." His quotation reminds us of what political scientist Robert Putnam has identified as bridging social capital (22-23, 400); Michael idealizes shared reading as a way to blur class divisions. Bridging social capital allows for a community and its members to gain access to new knowledge and information (Beugelsdijk and Smulders 2-7; Coffe and Geys 127; Putnam 172-175).

Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital includes "power" as a consideration. Participating in OBOC to gain cultural capital can be viewed as a mechanism for what Bourdieu ("Forms") would call gambling to gain capital in the cultural capital game (96-102). That is, OBOC participants could use the book events to gain cultural capital to jump class boundaries. Bourdieu (*Pascalian*), however, would most likely think this a failed proposition. He argued that "Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games… are not 'fair games.' Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations" (214-15).

If what Bourdieu argued holds true with our readers, to participate in one book events, such as book discussion groups or to ask questions at a panel presentation, they must have cultural literacy. If we are to understand Bourdieu —or Stanley Fish for that matter—, readers have to have book discussion skills that they learned from parents, teachers or other social institutions, such as book clubs. Readers who did not attend university literature courses, or those who have jobs that would not allow them the leisure time to meet for reading groups, might feel uncomfortable with shared interpretation practices. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that readers in book clubs tend to seek out pleasant university English class experiences but if their university experience were not pleasant, readers will resist book club membership (Rehberg Sedo "Badges" 247*;* "Readers" 72). We validated this early in our research project in Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge [Ontario, Canada]. The following exchange took place in a focus group with readers who did not participate in OBOC in that region. When we asked the readers why they did not attend events, this was their response:

> Dot: I read for pleasure, to be quite honest with you. I read for pleasure. I don't go into big, long details.
>
> Megan: Yeah, like when I read it's for fun, like, in school we have to read books and analyze it to death and they just, it just ruins a book for me. I hate it. I can never read a fairy tale again after taking Children's Lit. (laughter). I can't, honestly, it's just like "oh my God, you just ruined for me." (20 September 2004).

The pleasures of reading for Dot and Megan come from an internalised processing of their interpretations. If they do talk about the books they read,

they talk about them with friends or family members who also share a love of reading and who tend to like the same type of books as them. The discussion tends to be unsustained and mostly limited to book recommendations. Whether or not their perception of OBOC book programming is correct, they perceive an unattainable level of cultural literacy and practices in book discussion. When we tried to explain the events offered through the library around the chosen text, the readers themselves likened it to a book club discussion:

> SARAH: I was just going to say, I have always wanted to join a book club, I think it would be so much fun, but I would never do it, ever.
>
> I2: Why?
>
> SARAH: I'd be too intimidated 'cause even watching the Oprah ones they sit around and say all this nonsense and I'm like, what is she talking about? I understand, like analyzing books I can do that, fine. But like, some of these things that people say are so out there and I would, I would be one of those people who would sit there and say something and they'd be like, no, that's not really it.
>
> DOT: That would be intimidating to me, I have to agree with her actually (laugh).
>
> MEGAN: I wouldn't want to feel stupid.

These readers do not feel they have the necessary skills to participate in book events, even though the books they read are similar to those texts chosen by the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge producers. Talking about their interpretations would involve an articulation of knowledge they don't feel comfortable sharing. Instead, their book talk is limited to their intimate community.

An important point in this discussion is that there were few indications of participants who might be considered "lower class" in the events that we attended. Of course, participant observation does not often allow for easy identification of class. However, our survey data indicates that while most— or 70%— identified themselves as middle-class or upper-middle class, 30% identify as lower- or lower-middle class. As Dot, Megan and Sarah showed

us, and as various book historians have already argued successfully for the dissolution of the popular/high culture literature divide (Altick 82, 106; Howsam *Kegan Paul* 10-12, 68-71, *Old Books* 15-27, 55, 65-77; McHenry; Radway *Feeling, Reading;* Rose; Sicherman; St Clair 339-356; Vincent; Zboray and Saracino Zboray), we cannot say that lower-class readers do not read the types of books OBOC producers choose. However, that line of arguing is not where I want to take this essay. Instead, I want to return to the idealised and realised community that the readers expect and experience through OBOC programs because many of our study's readers, in addition to Dot, Megan and Sarah, assumed a kind of textual community inherent in OBOC programming that Stanley Fish conceived of in *Is There a Text in this Class?*

While the top reasons for not participating in OBOC events for our survey participants was a lack of knowing about the program (14%) or a lack of time (4%), the readers we talked with who do not participate in OBOC events suggest that there are a variety of intimidating or unpleasant factors inherent in the programming that do not coincide with their preferred reading practices. For those who *do* participate, the motivations are similarly complex.

Like the producers we spoke with, Michelle, a reader who participates in Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge OBOC programs, envisions an ephemeral community leading to a more civil, larger community. She said:

> I think that common experience could unite people and give them something to talk about. When people have something to talk about they learn more about each other's thoughts and opinions and then have a greater respect for each other's thoughts and opinions and then everybody gets along better. That's my opinion (laugh)… And um, and so, if everybody reads the same book hopefully that will happen and it will bring people closer together as a community through literature. (27 September 2004)

Within the exchange of shared interpretation, Michelle's reactions illustrate what many of our participants expected from the temporary communities made possible by OBOC events. She seeks the collective knowledge she regards as obtainable by exposure to the "Other" through talk and the text.

Through that talk, she envisions a possibility for what I mentioned above: an ability to bridge communities.

In addition to expressing the thrill of belonging to an ephemeral community, such as seeing someone on public transportation reading the same book, which was mentioned in a Chicago focus group, readers also feel a sense of belonging to a larger imagined community by participating in OBOC. Readers articulated this sentiment by expressing pride for being part of an intellectual city in Seattle, or multi-culturally sensitive citizen in Vancouver. Unprompted, Tim, an electrical engineer and a focus group participant in Huntsville, Alabama provided us with his reasons for participating. The entire quotation is noted below because it is telling in its entirety:

> Can I bring something up? Something that is a cultural phenomenon that kind of interests me, and really, it's like I consciously thought about these events, and why I like them. It's the idea that in this world of electronics, you lose community. And so, you get a chance and throw it together with *a lot of experienced people that maybe share an interest in something* [emphasis added], like reading or something, and that is a tremendous release for me. I mean, it's...I don't want to call it thrilling, but it's just, *I can't talk about stuff on the level I want to talk about it, so I go with this group of people who have similar interest in readings so I can go a little deeper* [emphasis added]. And, you know, it's nice to have a perspective that you haven't heard before, I find it tremendously emotionally fulfilling. From my standpoint, I'm always trying to figure out ways to get back into the community at large and find some friends that think the same way, or at least are open enough to sit down together and throw around ideas without offending each other.

In the first italicised section, Tim articulates an interest in collaborating not only with others "in the know," but also with others like himself and with similar interests. This sentence reminds us not only of Bourdieu's *Distinction,* but also of his autonomic and heteronomic poles within the literary culture field. That is, Tim recognizes the value of literature and seeks an opportunity to engage with high culture and literature, knowing that it sets him apart from an implied, less-privileged,

peer group. His cultural capital becomes social capital that provides the connections to other people. This community allows him access to the privilege. In the second italicized sentence, Tim implies that in order to participate in an event, one needs to already have a certain amount of cultural literacy and capital. He continues with a comment that again reminds us that the meanings of reading can be complex; reading can be both an educational and also a satisfying process. Finally, with the final sentence we note Tim's desire for what sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies would call *Gemeinschaft*, or "intimate community."

This essay identifies several types of community. First, and most obviously, there are instances of imagined community. Not only is this evident in the larger national or regional conceptionalisations famously provided by Benedict Anderson, but also in the idealisation of various classes and ethnicities coming together—bridging—through one text. The events bring together readers who have a learned set of skills in other settings. Through previous experiences participating in OBOC events or perhaps through preconceived notions of what participation entails, readers seek community that they believe simultaneously allows for the gaining of cultural capital, and that which also brings pleasure. The community they find is ephemeral, but rarely intimate. Access to the various communities is not always possible. Without pre-determined cultural literacy, readers cannot participate in the expected norms of shared reading practices.

While Bourdieu's field theory provides a useful starting point for an analysis of OBOC, it is missing an understanding of the pleasures shared reading can provide. Through the analysis in this essay, we are beginning to better understand, in part, that articulations of pleasure are wrapped up in repeated messages of reading as a civilizing endeavor. Both participants and producers think that participation in shared reading events can lead to a grander, more cohesive physical community.

Producers of such events often attempt to create programming that does not require book knowledge or interpretive skills. Through events that do not necessarily include discussion of a text, such as music jams or play adaptations, producers attempt to create access for people who either may not be readers, or who may not have the cultural literacy or capital to actively participate in book culture.

Bourdieu (*Field*) argued that the field of cultural production is a "universe of belief" (164), and that when speaking about it, one is "preaching to the converted."

> The artistic field is a universe of belief. Cultural production distinguishes itself from the production of the most common objects in that it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of its artistic legitimacy.

This begins to explain the consistent themes – of reading as liberating, and reading as a producer of engaged and responsible citizenry. The data from this study suggests that both producers and readers expect the ephemeral communities that form in OBOC programs to provide opportunities for gaining cultural capital that will be useful in the wider geographical or physical community. Some of the expectations extend to formation of even larger conceptualisations of community. While we know that the expectations and realities of OBOC programming can be exclusionary to some groups, we also know that for some readers, the experiences of shared reading bring much pleasure. Within the contemporary culture of shared reading, cultural capital—that is, prestige, status and authority—might look differently than it did in previous eras. For our particular readers, cultural capital is produced in a collaborative, or community, setting. Those with authority are fellow readers, not necessarily traditional actors in the literary cultural field.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

Based at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, DeNel Rehberg Sedo works in the sociology of literature. Her interests and scholarly training are rooted in the social contexts of reading and in women's reading practices and learning communities, in particular. New technologies, and their influence on reading practices and the cultural field of publishing, play a special role in her research. Along with Danielle Fuller from the University of Birmingham (UK), her current project is an investigation of contemporary reading cultures in Canada, the UK and the USA. She can be reached at denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca.

Notes

[1] Including Medicine Hat, AB (http://www.shortgrass-lib.ab.ca/mhpl/); Vancouver, BC (http://www.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/); Yellowknife, NWT; and Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge (http://news.therecord.com/sections/onebook2008); Edmonton and Hamilton, and university programs

[2] Including Edinburgh (http://talesofonecity.wordpress.com/tag/one-edinburgh-one-read/); Liverpool Reads (http://www.liverpoolreads.com/); The Great Reading Adventure; One Book for Stevenage (http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/townandcommunity/onebookforstevenage). Readers of this article might be interested in looking at the US Library of Congress webpage (http://www.read.gov/resources/) that lists not only the various North American One Book programs, but also some of those in other parts of the world. The list is not complete, but it is informative. The webpage provides titles that have been selected for the programs, searchable by author and title.

[3] Available online at http://publicprograms.ala.org/orc/discussionprograms/bookdiscussion/onebook.html

[4] Some of the titles have also been the source of controversy. For example, titles such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) have as late as the 1980s been included on lists of banned books. The titles currently include: *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, 1972; *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, 1953; *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather, 1918; *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, 1925; *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines, 1997; *The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett, 1930; *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, 1929; *Sun, Stone, and Shadows: 20 Great Mexican Short Stories* edited by Jorge Hernandez, 2008; *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, 1937; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, 1960; *A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula K. Le Guin, 1968; *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London, 1913; *The Thief and the Dogs* by Naguib Mahfouz, 1961; *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers, 1940; *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick, 1989; *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson, 1980; *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, 1939; *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, 1989; *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy, 1886; *The Adventures of Tom Swayer* by Mark Twain, 1876; *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton, 1920; and, *Old School* by Tobias Wolff, 2003.

[5] http://www.chipublib.org/eventsprog/programs/onebook_onechgo.php

[6] Personal interview with Mary Wallace, 23 May 2006.

[7] *Beyond the Book* is an interdisciplinary, trans-national analysis of mass reading events and the contemporary meanings of reading in the UK, USA and Canada. Please see http://www.beyondthebookproject.org for more information on the project. The author would like to thank her research partner, Danielle Fuller, for her intellectual assistance in working through ideas for this essay, and to especially thank her for the comments on an earlier version of the piece. She would also like to acknowledge the financial support for this project from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), and Mount Saint Vincent University and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation for providing funding for the Atlantic Canada Communications Issues Research Lab.

[8] See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Polity Press, 1993); and, Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison, and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[9] General readership income is discussed in Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

[10] See Jack Quarter, "James John Harpell: An Adult Education Pioneer," *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 14, 1 (2000): 89-112.

[11] See also Beth Driscoll, "How Oprah's Book Club Reinvented the Woman Reader." Driscoll concentrates on Oprah's Book Club to argue that literary values have shifted the symbolic "consecration" (139) of literature as identified by Bourdieu to one of economic value (139-50).

[12] I refer here to Starbucks and Boeing, who have both given in-kind or financial support to OBOC programs.

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