

**Institutionalised classism? : an investigation into
how far public libraries are serving the needs of
working class individuals and communities.**

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate how far the library needs of working class individuals and communities are being met. It also seeks to establish how far libraries are institutionally 'classist'. In order to fulfil this aim, the study had a number of objectives. These are: to examine working class library use; to investigate barriers to use; to establish working class library needs.

The study adopts an inductive approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce findings. Library user questionnaires were undertaken in three case study libraries, two located in working class communities and one in a mixed community. Library staff in all three libraries were also interviewed. In addition, non-library users in both areas were questioned.

The study found that, contrary to some assertions, from a user's perspective current library services are serving the needs of the working class individuals who use them, although there is acknowledgement that improvements could be made. Staff, though, were less positive about how certain aspects of the service were serving working class user needs. In addition, it was clear from the responses of non-library users that for some working class individuals, whatever the reality, the library is perceived as not for them.

The study concludes that public libraries could do more to serve the needs of working class communities. Introducing information technology, expanding and promoting current information services are two ways in which the needs of existing working class users could be met. These changes could also attract new working class users. However, the study shows that, for many working class people, maintaining and developing

existing core borrowing services remains essential. The study concludes with a number of recommendations for further research.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Recent survey research has revealed that significantly fewer working class than middle class people are using the public library (Insight, 1999, Bohme and Spiller, 1999). However, whilst noteworthy, these statistics are not particularly surprising. Over the past fifty years, library user studies have consistently shown that working class library use is not proportional to this social group's percentage of the population. While public libraries have undergone various changes, especially over the last ten years, the trend of low working class library use has remained constant.

What has changed, though, is that low working class library use has become more of a social and political issue and has been linked to the problem of social exclusion. For the present Labour government, tackling social exclusion is a key priority. This concept is defined in *Preventing Social Exclusion* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) as,

“A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown”

However, while the government has developed the concept of social exclusion, some critics have claimed that this has been to avoid using the term working class: the fact that this description of social exclusion seems to characterise elements of working class individuals and communities is telling. While working class people may not be specifically referred to as socially excluded in many government or LIS (Library and Information Studies) publications, the definition of social exclusion above clearly indicates that they have these individuals and communities in mind when referring to this issue.

The relatively low use of public libraries by working class individuals can be regarded as a key issue when discussing the issue of social exclusion for two reasons. First, the public library is widely regarded as an institution that should be open to all members of the community; the fact that, in practice, it is not is an issue that should be examined further. Second, *Libraries for all* (DCMS, 1999) makes clear that public libraries have an active role to play in tackling social exclusion, by making libraries more relevant and welcoming to those groups who under use them. In order to achieve this goal in relation to working class individuals, it seems fundamentally important to establish what their library needs are.

In addition, the issue of examining working class library needs is important because there are a number of more radical commentators in the LIS community who assert that, at present, public libraries are not serving these needs. The strength of this feeling is such that public libraries have been accused of having “institutionalised classism” (Pateman, 2000). This phrase, clearly based on the concept of “institutionalised racism” as defined in the Mcpherson Report (1999) following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, implies that the culture, practices and procedures of public libraries work against working class individuals. This assertion further necessitates an examination of working class user needs.

Despite the fact that the profile of working class library users has been inadvertently raised by the government’s social inclusion agenda and commentary from within the LIS Community, there has, as yet, been no research undertaken whose primary purpose is to investigate working class user needs or how far current services are meeting their needs. Given the continued trend of low public library usage by the working class, examining working class library use and needs seems apposite as a subject for investigation in its own right.

In order to answer the questions about how far libraries are meeting needs, it seems logical to directly question working class library users and the library staff who serve these individuals and communities, rather than relying on speculation, prejudice or political beliefs. Only then can it be established what, if any, these specific needs are and how they can be met.

1.1 Aims

The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent to which public libraries serve the needs of working class individuals and communities. The primary focus on the research will be on the use and needs of current working class library users. However, the issue of working class library use of course also extends to outside the library and, therefore, issues relating to barriers to working class library use will also be examined by questioning non-users. It is hoped that from the information gained, it may be possible to identify the services working class people and communities need their public libraries to provide.

1.2 Objectives:

The research had a number of specific objectives:

- To examine how working class people use public libraries
- To identify any barriers to working class use of public libraries
- To identify the specific library needs of working class people
- To investigate the extent to which the public library is serving these working class library needs

- To establish whether there are any differences in library use/needs if the library is located in a working class area as opposed to a more socially diverse area.

1.3 Limitations of study

Examining such a general topic as “working class library needs” is an ambitious aim for a small-scale project. In many ways, this research can only provide a limited analysis of this topic. It seems likely that investigating this subject will pose more questions than answers. However, the research will provide a greater insight into working class public library use and needs that will be of benefit to both policy makers and practitioners, which will, crucially, in turn, impact on the library users themselves.

Chapter 2 Working Class - Definitional Issues

2.1 Theory

This study suggests that being working class may be a potentially significant factor in determining library needs. However, it is clear that there is not universal support for class analysis in relation to LIS or indeed any other discipline. Since Nisbet's (1959) seminal paper "the decline and fall of class", it has been suggested, fairly regularly, that class is no longer a relevant factor in categorizing people (Westergaard, 1995; Crompton & Scott, 2000). More specifically, it has been argued that increased economic prosperity, together with a decline in manual jobs, means that the working class no longer exist as a recognisable group (Giddens, 1997).

However, the assertion that the working class does not exist seems to clash with the fact that the majority of individuals seem quite willing to ascribe themselves to a class group and more specifically describe themselves as working class. The British Election Study revealed that 96% of respondents ascribed themselves a class. Moreover, over 60% described themselves as working class (Guardian, 1999). Thus, it appears that, at a subjective level, social class, and the label working class, seems to be a still relevant, if ill defined, concept in people's lives.

Moreover, it is clear from the literature on sociological theory that the existence and relevance of class differences does not demand a subjective awareness of it. According to Westergaard (1995) building on the ideas of class theorists, Karl Marx and Max Weber, class is "a set of social divisions that arise from society's economic organization". Thus, as long as society is structured in a certain way, class will remain an objective reality. There is, as Scase (1992:6) recognises, a mutually dependent relationship between

class and capitalism, “capitalism cannot function without social classes; equally no social classes exist without capitalism”.

However, while it is clear that the way our society is structured means that class differences exist, how and why individuals are allocated to different class groups is debated. According to Marx, an individual’s class is defined by their relationship to the ownership of the means of production. Thus, when he was living, if you owned property you were a member of the bourgeoisie and if you sold your labour and you were a member of the working class or proletariat. Today, it seems outdated to call those who sell their labour power, working class. However, Scase (1992) argues that Marx’s model can still be seen as relevant. While few individuals actually own the means of production, it is still possible to associate some tasks with capital and some with labour.

Weber, in response to Marx, provides a perhaps more complex analysis of class. Like Marx, Weber’s analysis is fundamentally economic, arguing that “property or lack of property are the basic categories of class situations “ (Weber, 1968) However, his analysis extends to take in a greater number of economic variables by saying that an individual’s class position is also based on their market situation which is determined by an individual’s skills and qualifications or “marketable abilities”. A higher level of skill can make an individual more valuable in the market place and therefore of a higher class position.

Thus, education also plays a role in determining occupation and therefore class position. However, education achievement itself is also strongly linked to class background, “on average children of parents in social groups D& E obtain only a third as many GCSEs grades A-C as do state educated children from other social groups” (Adonis & Pollard, 1997:50).

Marx and Weber’s analyses are similar in that both theorists rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on economic position to determine class position.

In turn, modern class theorists have simplified this analysis into a focus on occupation as a readily measurable indicator of social class. It is clear, though, at least at a popular level, that class is not regarded solely in terms of occupation (Reid, 1989).

Other criteria regarded as determining class position typically include how people speak, where they live and the friends they have (Reid: 1989). However, while these are popular indicators of social class, they would not be regarded sociologically valid by many commentators because they are based on impressionistic data rather than objective analysis. Thus, despite the flaws with using an occupational definition, this nevertheless remains the main measurement of class position. Therefore, the class of the individuals questioned in this research will be determined by their occupation.

The difficulty is determining which occupational groups make up the working class. Working class is a term that is used in a very generalised sense and as Martin (1987:68) rightly notes, “we soon run into difficulties once we try to decide who is in it and who is not “. Marx saw the working class individual as “an appendage of the machine”. This description, which focuses on the manual nature of the work, remains an accepted way of distinguishing working class individuals. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines working class as: “The grade or grades of society comprising those who are employed to work for wages in manual or industrial occupations”. It is clear, though, that accepting the definition of the working class as being those in manual work is problematic.

The above overview of some of the key sociological arguments about class illustrates that there will never be a totally objective and comprehensive definition of what constitutes the working class that will be acceptable to all. While the theoretical niceties of attempting to classify people can be

discussed *ad nauseum*, for the purposes of research and analysis it is necessary to delineate the boundary between the working and middle class. Clearly, on one level, the distinction will be rather arbitrary and simplistic, but there is a general agreement among those undertaking empirical research that occupational groups are used as shorthand for these class distinctions and boundaries.

2.2 Practice

There are a number of scales that attempt to classify individuals into class groups. An often-used social class classification in the LIS literature is the ABC market research system. This method of classification has been heavily criticised by some sociologists as ascription to a particular group depends on patterns of spending and consumption and thus "bears no relation to the class theories developed by Marx and Weber" (Giddens, 1997). However, despite this criticism, an examination of the types of occupations that fall into each of the assigned categories compares favourably with more theoretically robust methods of class stratification. Thus, while the market research system will not be used in this study to classify individuals, it still seems valid to compare the results from this research with other research that uses this classification.

In order to determine which individuals will be defined as working class, the 2001 National Statistics socio-economic classification will be used. This is an occupationally based classification, although provision is made to cover the entire population. It comprises eight classes, the first two of which can be subdivided. This schema can be seen to have a number of strengths. Most importantly, it has been developed from sociological classification. Based on Goldthorpe's (1987) complex multi-divisional schema, it is widely acknowledged by to be an improvement on the previous "crude" divisions (Guardian, 2001). As well as classification according to job title, it takes into

account working conditions, prospects and security. Furthermore, it is widely used, accepted internationally and conceptually clear. However, while this schema has its strengths, it does not explicitly make a distinction as to which categories of occupation should be considered working class. Thus, the researcher had to make a decision about which occupations would be termed working class, acknowledging that it may not be a distinction that is universally acceptable. Thus, those individuals whose occupations falls into categories 5, 6 and 7 will be considered working class for this research. These are, respectively, lower supervisory craft and related occupations such as plumbers, semi-routine occupations such as shop assistants and routine occupations such as building labourers and cleaners.

Justification for this decision is based on a number of the ideas discussed above. Individuals working in these jobs are performing tasks that can be seen to be associated with labour rather than capital (Scase, 1992). Linked to this, those working in these jobs, especially 6 and 7 need few skills or little training. In addition, workers in these categories can be seen to have little autonomy working in a situation where they exercise little discretion and judgement and have no role in the management of the organisation.

Clearly this schema is not without its faults. The most notable is that, like the sociological theory that underpins it, class position is based solely on occupational data. This clearly means that those not in employment -the retired, housewives, unemployed, students, long term sick - are left out. In order to overcome these weaknesses, individuals who are unemployed, retired or look after the home or children will be asked what their last occupation was.

Chapter 3 Background

Public libraries are statutory institutions provided for the benefit of all. Their duty to serve all sectors of society is codified at many levels. For example, the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto asserts that:

“The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. (UNESCO, 1997)”.

It is this universality that is often remarked upon. According to Usherwood (1996:81), the public library “is valued by all sections of society”. In particular, the idea that the library favours the interests of the better off has been strongly refuted: the “middle class myth of libraries is dead” (House of Commons Culture Media and Sports Committee: 2000) However, recent national surveys suggest that public libraries are not being used equally by all sectors of society. Moreover, class continues to be the most significant determinant of public library use.

According to the 1998 Household Library Use Survey (Book Marketing Ltd: 1998), individuals in social grade categories D and E, who make up 31% of all households, account for 25% of borrowing visits and only 18% of all other visits. In addition, individuals in these categories are more likely to be non-users, less likely to hold a ticket and are less frequent users. These findings broadly correlate with those of the comprehensive *Review of the Public Library Service* (Aslib, 1995). While there are some discrepancies in the statistics (Aslib put the usage slightly higher at 32%) the overall conclusions are the same.

“There are higher proportions ...of people in the A, B and C1 socio-economic groups who regularly go to public libraries” (Aslib, 1995:7).

Thus, while in theory public libraries notionally exist to serve the entire community, in practice, this is not being realised.

The Comedia (1993: 9) research into the future of public libraries recognises that public library use statistics are part of a broader trend in public service use.

“As with all publicly funded institutions the public library is used and exploited more by middle class groups than the poorer groups in society”.

Bramley’s (1996) analysis of figures from the 1991 Breadline Britain Survey (a study of attitudes to a range of public services by the poor and disadvantaged) confirms this statement. Those in the higher social classes were 1.4 times more likely to use the library, and also more likely to visit museums and galleries, adult education classes and sports facilities than the working class. His analysis goes further to explain this phenomenon. Using Bramley and Le Grand’s (1992) taxonomy of “demand-led” and “needs rationed” services, he classes public libraries as “demand led”. As such, they are always likely to benefit those more able to articulate their needs; in other words the middle class.

That the public library is predominately used by the middle classes is not a recent finding. Bereleson’s (1949:126) classic study into US public library use illustrates that recent statistics represent a continuity of an existing trend. His findings concluded, “the library is pretty much a middle class institution”. It is also worth stressing the relative universality of this phenomenon. Ward’s (1977) ambitious analysis of over a hundred public library user statistics studies revealed that, in addition to the US, the middle class were an “over represented” group in French, Australian and German studies. Key British studies by Groombridge (1964) and Luckham (1971)

which, until relatively recently, provided the most comprehensive survey data on library users, found similar results. Luckham (1971:2) found variables associated with class particularly noteworthy:

"The striking thing ... in the results is the importance of universal factors like education ... and occupation rather than local differences".

The above comment highlights another important issue noted in a number of these earlier studies - that of the relative importance of education and library use compared with class and library use. Indeed it has been suggested that it is education, or the rather more dubious "intelligence", rather than class that is the significant issue when examining the subject of library use and needs (Bereleson, 1949). This was a point raised more recently by Proctor and Bartle (2002). While it seems perfectly valid to focus on the significance of education, in some ways this obscures the issue. In Britain, education is largely determined by class background.

While these quantitative studies are useful at highlighting the disparities in public library use by social class, they clearly have their limitations. Their descriptive, rather than analytical, nature means that while they tell us something about the current situation, as Nauritil (1985:11) rightly notes, they "do little to indicate causes and remedies".

In addition, they only provide a national perspective and therefore give no indication of how far usage patterns may differ at a local level. Thus, in order to gain a deeper understanding of working class public library use, these statistics need to be supplemented with further research into this subject. However, although class is clearly an important variable in public library use, it is an issue that has rarely been addressed in any detail in the LIS literature on public libraries. This lack of research seems to reflect "the general reluctance of the library profession, especially those working at

higher levels, to address the issue of class” (Muddiman et al., 2000), an omission which has been explained variously as a result of ”discomfort” with the subject (Pateman: 2000) and the professions’ “neutrality” (Coleman: 1981). An exception to this seems to be the examination of class in the context of the history of the public library (see for example Black, A, 2000a). Cynically, it could be considered that focusing on the historical provides a “safe” way of addressing the issue of class.

A few studies have explicitly examined working class information needs. Chatman’s (1987) focus on library use as part of a broader study of the “information world” of the working class, gives some insights into library needs and reasons for non-use. However, its focus on a distinct group, black janitors at a US University, makes it difficult to generalise from the findings.

More recently, Marcella and Baxter (2000:239) found that “social class ...had an impact upon information need and information seeking behaviour” in relation to citizenship information. The results of their large-scale survey studies are valuable in that they give an insight into what types of information the working class were using libraries for and what other sources were also being used. However, its conscious focus on just one of the public library ‘s many roles means that it isn’t possible to tell if non-use of the library means the library as a whole is failing or if it is just failing in the area of citizenship information need.

Thus, most of the LIS literature on class generally takes the form of analysis of existing literature. While critical examination of this can result in a new angle on the subject, little actual new evidence emerges. For example, Deveraux ‘s (1972: 170) poses a number of interesting questions about class and library use; “Do the working class have any special needs? Should there be special kinds of libraries in working class areas?”

However, his attempts to answer these questions are limited by his unquestioning reliance on existing sources. Similarly Jordan's (1972) *Social class, Race Relations and the Public library* is more concerned with flagging up potential issues related to class and posing questions than providing any new answers. The fact that this article was regarded as "by far the best of these earlier studies" (Lahov: 1989) fifteen years after its publication illustrates the paucity of the literature on class until this date.

The social inclusion agenda of the present government can be seen to have prompted the issue of class and public library use to be re-examined. Again though, how far the literature produced as a result of this can be seen to extend our understanding of working class user needs is questionable. A number of articles produced in the professional literature can be regarded as more of an effort to raise awareness about the issue rather than an attempt to provide a deeper scholarly understanding of the subject. Thus, Vine (1993) highlights potential barriers to working class library use while Black (2000b) provides an essentially historical overview of social class in relation to the history of public libraries in the UK.

However, there have been more concerted efforts to examine in greater detail the issue of social class. *Open to all?* (Muddiman et al, 2000), a study of the public library and its capacity to tackle social inclusion, includes a number of papers that focus on the issue of working class library use. Moreover, as well as individual papers acknowledging class as an issue, the report as a whole recognises class as integral to understanding and tackling the problems of social exclusion. Pateman (2000:36) argues that inequalities produced by capitalism mean that "intrinsic links" exist between social exclusion and social class. This more political stance can be seen to mark a shift from the literature of the 1970s and 80s. While the former was, in many ways, still questioning how far class was an issue that librarians

should be dealing with, the latter regards low working class use of libraries as an issue that cannot be ignored.

However, despite the fact that concern about this issue is increasing in some circles, user studies that focus explicitly on working class library needs have not materialised and it is recognised that there is “inadequate research evidence” in this area (Muddiman: 1999). It is possible to ascertain some idea as to how working class people are using public libraries and any barriers to use from user studies and qualitative evidence from other studies. However, this ad hoc methodology, grafting local user evidence onto national surveys, may not be presenting an accurate reflection of public library use by the working class. Until a more substantial study of working class user needs is undertaken, it seems difficult to come to any firm conclusions on this subject. Thus, the continued pertinence of the subject, together with the lack of research in this area, is a key reason for the focus of this study.

Another reason for undertaking the present study is to examine the respective validity of a number of seemingly contradictory views that exist in the literature about how far public libraries are serving the working class. According to a series of articles by Pateman (1996, 1999, 2000) low public library use statistics are easily explained; public libraries are failing to serve working class needs. Focusing on evidence from a number of studies, he concludes that cultural barriers, together with the attitudes of librarians, mean that working class people often feel uncomfortable using the public library. His belief that both consciously and unconsciously the library, as an institution, enforces and maintains practices that discriminate against working class people is forcefully summed up: “public libraries have institutionalised classism”. Muddiman (1999) supports this thesis, “for many, public libraries continue to be associated with a white, middle class, academic culture which alienates many disadvantaged people”.

However, the view that public libraries are failing the working class contrasts with many of the results from social audit and social impact studies, a number of which have been based in what might be termed working class areas. Linley and Usherwood (1998) piloted qualitative methodologies to “audit” the social benefit of public libraries. Their study, which included a number of deprived wards in Newcastle, came to positive conclusions, “libraries enrich the lives of many people” and help individuals and communities “get started” and “keep going” on a wide range of activities”. Similarly, evidence from Proctor et al (1996), Harris (1998) and Matassaro (1998) found support from working class users for a range of public library services. These studies indicate then that, not only are public libraries being used by working class people, they are also highly valued.

The serving/failing dichotomy does not fully encompass opinion on the subject of working class library user needs. There is an alternative scenario that has not been so readily addressed, especially by those who think the public library is failing the working class. That is, some working class people do not actually have any desire to use public libraries, especially traditional services, and will not do so however much they are targeted at them.

“I think you’re flogging a dead horse here, because people in this room don’t really use a library and I don’t think whatever you call it you’re not gonna get us through the door. It’s because we don’t read the fact that we don’t go really (sic)” (MVA, 1998 report quoted in Muddiman: 1999).

Thus, public libraries, as long as they retain a bookish orientation, will remain, for some, an irrelevant and unnecessary institution.

There is not necessarily an absolute conflict between all these views. Muddiman (1999:5) attempts to explain these inconsistencies in the current

evidence by conceding that the working class use public libraries, but suggesting that only a small section is benefiting:

“The numerical evidence suggests that it is a minority of the working class who are socially, educationally or intellectually aspirational who particularly value and use public library services”.

However, this reasoning seems to be flawed. It seems impossible to establish from statistics alone that it is an “aspirational” minority of the working class that are using public libraries. However, this type of assertion, together with the opinions voiced above, highlights the importance of taking a more rigorous and detailed look at working class public library needs and establishing how far assertions about their lack of fulfilment are true. It is hoped that the present study will provide a clearer picture of working class public library use.

4.0 Methodology and Methods of Investigation

4.1 Methodology

An overall inductive approach to the research is taken. This involves using so-called “grounded theory”, an approach that “begins with specific observations and builds towards general patterns” (Patton, 1990). Given the clear lack of consensus in the literature on the use and needs of working class public library, it would not be possible to formulate an initial hypothesis to test as is necessary in deductive research methods. The nature of the study demands that evidence is gathered first. Using this “bottom up” approach allows the theory to emerge from the data rather than the researcher having to make assumptions from the beginning (Bryman: 2001). Conclusions are then drawn from the data (Bell, 1987).

The exploratory nature of the study, with its focus on context and individual’s perceptions, suggests qualitative research methods will be uniquely placed to gather the necessary data. Using qualitative methods is acknowledged to be particularly appropriate when looking at libraries as “it allows the exploration of human situations, settings, attitudes and emotions that are impossible to study using rigidly defined statistical methods” Mellon (1990:20). In addition, Gorman & Clayton (1997) note that qualitative methods are “ideal” when assessing the quality of a service, which is in a way the broad focus of the study.

While the study is essentially based on qualitative data in order to explain reasons for use, non-use and library needs, quantitative data was also collected in order to make it easier to compare responses within this study and with previous studies. This combination of the two research approaches or a number of research methods is known as triangulation. There is debate about how far triangulation can offer a “single, well

integrated picture of the situation” (Patton: 1990). Indeed, it is clear from the above description of their use that the two methodologies are, in effect, measuring different phenomena. However, it is widely acknowledged that using a combination of methodologies, both qualitative and/or quantitative, improves the richness of the data collected (Gorman & Clayton: 1997) as well as protecting against distortion that might arise from using just one approach.

4.1.1 Case study

A case study approach is considered “ideally suited” to small-scale research such as this (Blaxter, 2001:71). It seems particularly appropriate in this case as much of the existing research about working class public library use focuses on usage at a national level, thus not giving any indication as to how trends may differ at a local level and, perhaps more importantly, not giving any detailed understanding as to why. It is acknowledged that, in many ways, the evidence gained will be specific to that case. However, it is recognised that it may be possible to derive an understanding of wider phenomenon from intensive investigation of a case (Gorman & Clayton, 1997).

Three case study sites were chosen. This number was chosen partly in order to fulfil the objective of comparison of working class and socially diverse areas. In addition, using more than one case study is thought to increase the robustness of the findings (Herriot & Firestone, 1983 cited in Yin, 1994). Thus, by using three case studies, comparison could be made of library usage and needs in between the working class areas and the more socially diverse area and between the two working class communities.

4.1.2 Choice of case studies

The case study libraries to be examined were chosen in consultation with Martin Dutch, Head of Eastern Group at Sheffield. Although the three chosen were based in the Northern group, Martin had had experience of working in two of the libraries and was able to offer information both about the libraries and the communities they serve. There were three criteria for selection. First, given the focus of the study, two of the libraries needed to be in working class communities, while the other had to be in a more mixed community. Second, and related to this, in order that the findings could be considered theoretically robust libraries were chosen in parts of the city where ward data reflecting the make up of the community it served could be readily obtained. Third, in order not to add another potentially significant variable to the study, communities with a low ethnic minority population were chosen.

4.2 Methods of Investigation

4.2.1 Literature Search

The initial literature search is an important element in the research process. Even at this stage, gaining an understanding of the extent of publications on a topic can “point up questions, anomalies or gaps in existing knowledge” (Gash, 2000) Indeed, in this case it was discovering the lack of research on this specific subject that provided the researcher with a focus.

A number of sources were used to find literature on the topic. The article that sparked an interest in the topic of working class library needs was John Pateman’s (2000) *Public Libraries, Social Exclusion and Social Class*. Thus, it seemed to make sense initially to consult the citations referred to in this work. As well as providing sources of useful background information, it was also useful to consult them in order to gain an understanding of how he

reached his conclusions. After these were exhausted, the researcher turned to other sources.

Initially, the University of Sheffield library catalogue STAR was searched for books, monographs and reports related to the subject. After these, COPAC, a union catalogue of research universities, was also searched. This revealed a range of material that was not available at the University of Sheffield. Thus, use was also made of the Bodleian library in Oxford. In addition to books, monographs and reports, a range of periodical articles was accessed through online databases including LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts), Web of Science and BIDS.

In all cases, the initial searches were conducted using the terms “working class” & “public library”. When these terms failed to retrieve any sources, which they often did, more general search terms were used in place of “working class”. These included “social exclusion”, “poverty” “disadvantaged” and “social class”. Interestingly, these alternative terms were often more successful in retrieving information about class and library use. The fact that much of the literature does not explicitly mention the working class highlights the general trend away from class based terminology towards the more general language of “social exclusion” favoured by the government and other organisations (Muddiman: 1999).

4.2.2 Literature review

A literature review can be seen to have a number of purposes. It is important to establish what has already been written in order to establish why the present research is necessary. In addition, it provides the researcher and the reader with an understanding of the general background and context to the study (Hart, 1998). As Yin (1993:9) rightly notes, the literature review “is not an end in itself”. It is through analysis of what has

been done before that the researcher can determine the questions for future research. As mentioned above, there was little original research that focused explicitly on working class library use. What articles and reports did address the subject of class focused on the lack of research into working class user needs. As a result, this became the main focus of the study.

4.2.3 Library User Questionnaires

Questionnaires with library users were conducted over a period of two weeks from the 17th - 29th June 2002. A total of 40 user questionnaires were completed at each library. Questionnaires were conducted face to face with the researcher writing down the answers as it is recognised that this method is more likely to get a more detailed response (Bailey: 1994). In addition, it was felt that this would overcome any problems respondents might have with reading or writing.

The library user questionnaires were designed to find out how working class people were using libraries, whether there were any barriers to their use of the library, which parts of the service they valued and what library needs they had (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was semi-structured, combining a mixture of closed and open questions as recommended in the literature (Bell, 1999, Robson, 1993). A number of closed questions were used as these are “easier to code and analyse” (Bailey, 1994) thus trends can more easily be noted. However, these types of questions do not allow the researcher to understand why the respondent has answered in that way. Thus, open questions were used in conjunction with the closed in order to probe the answers more deeply.

4.2.4 Non-library User Questionnaires

In order to gain an understanding of how far libraries are serving the needs of working class users, it was deemed important to focus on people who were not using the library (Appendix 2). It was initially envisaged that non-users would be questioned at all libraries. However, due to the time consuming nature of collecting this data it was decided to focus on Southey and Stocksbridge, thus ensuring comparisons between the two different areas could still be made, though not at the expense of gaining other evidence. In each case the questionnaires were conducted in the vicinity of the library by a parade of shops. These questionnaires followed a similar format to the library user questionnaires and indeed some of the questions were identical so comparisons could be easily made with users.

Assessing library needs

Aslib's (1995) report on the public library service recognised the importance of examining the needs of the public in relation to library use. However, it has been acknowledged that actually doing this can be a complex and difficult task (Totterdell & Bird, 1976). Nicholas (2000) notes that there is first the issue of distinguishing between what is a need and what is a want. However, Totterdell & Bird (1976:16) recognise that in relation to libraries this is a false dichotomy and is "arbitrary" and "meaningless". One of the difficulties in analysing need is that there are several types of need: expressed need, when people are aware of what they want; unexpressed needs when users are aware of their needs and don't or won't express them and inactivated or dormant needs when people are not actually aware of what they need.

Another pertinent issue is the idea of objective and subjective needs assessment. Percy-Smith & Sanderson (1992) discuss this concept defining

objective needs as those decided by the experts, while subjective needs are decided by individuals and communities. Much of the literature that argues that working class library needs are not being met implies that the “experts” have an understanding of their needs. However, it seems to be generally accepted that it is better for the individuals themselves to determine needs. Thus, a number of questions focused on how important various library services were to users, as it has been noted that needs can refer to services that already exist (Percy Smith and Sanderson, 1992). In addition, respondents were asked directly about any other services the library could provide. This of course does not guarantee meaningful answers. Harris (1998) noted the difficulties in getting people to think beyond what the library was already providing.

Sensitive questions

It was important that the researcher gained information from those questioned about their occupation in order to determine who would be classified as working class in the results analysis. As these are recognised as sensitive questions which respondents may feel uncomfortable answering (Oppenheim, 2000), these questions were put at the end of the questionnaire. It was thought that by this time the respondent should be convinced of the validity of the research and therefore be more likely to answer (Bailey, 1994). Indeed, in all cases, the respondents were happy to give this information.

It was also important for classification purposes that the information gained about a person’s occupation was as accurate as possible. According to Oppenheim (2000:134), by asking the person the name of their job and then what it actually entails “keeps the unclassifiables to under 10%”. Thus, this approach was adopted.

4.2.5 Questionnaire sample

So-called opportunity or convenience sampling was used in order to determine questionnaire respondents both inside and outside the library. This simply involves questioning whoever is available. Opportunity sampling has been criticised as a “cheap and dirty way of doing a sample survey” (Robson, 2002: 265). However, the flaws of this method seem outweighed by its strengths in a small-scale project such as this where there was a limited amount of time to collect the data. Indeed, this ‘opportunist’ sampling is recognized in the literature as being both practical and efficient (Bell, 1987).

Clearly, the possibilities of generalising from the data gained using opportunity sampling are limited and there is a potential for bias (Gorman & Clayton, 1997). However, given the essentially qualitative nature of the study ensuring that the results can be generalisable was not a key concern. Having said this, in order to ensure at least a degree of representativeness questionnaires were conducted in each library at different times of the day. In order to maximize the chances of gaining responses from working people, users at each library were questioned on a Saturday morning.

4.2.6 Pilot questionnaire

A pilot of the user and non user questionnaire was carried out in Stocksbridge a few days prior to the actual fieldwork. Conducting a pilot is recognised as a valuable way of ensuring that the questions, the ordering of the questions and the timing are right when it comes to conducting the real thing (Bell, 1987; Oppenheim, 2000). As a result of the pilot, a few additions were made to the educational achievement and employment status options on both questionnaires. The most significant of these

changes was including an option for self-employed which is essential information when determining an individual's class position.

4.2.7 Interviews with library staff

Interviews were conducted with eight library staff. In each case, the community librarian for the library and also one library assistant at Southey and two at Parson's Cross and Stockbridge were interviewed. Interviews with library staff were conducted in order to gain additional and comparative information (Gorman & Clayton, 1997). This could then be used to challenge or support findings from the questionnaire data.

Interview guide

An interview guide was used which comprised general subject areas to be discussed followed up by probes "to lead the respondent to answer the question more fully and accurately" (Bailey, 1994:189). Using an interview guide is regarded as a favourable alternative to a rigid predetermined set of questions as it offers a flexible approach to the 'unpredictability' of the personal interview situation (Busha & Harter 1980).

In all but two cases, the interviews were recorded using a dictaphone. Written notes were also taken in all interviews, partly as a backup and also to make it easier for the researcher to revisit key points. It is recognised that there are disadvantages with recording interviews. However, it was decided that the benefits seemed to outweigh any disadvantages. What was particularly useful about recording the interviews in relation to this inductive research was the possibility of returning to the recordings as new hypotheses were developed (Silverman, 1997).

4.3 Community and Library Profiles

Southey

Southey is one of the most deprived estates in the country, ranking 43 out of 8141 on the Indices of Deprivation 2000. As such, it suffers from a range of associated problems including higher than average poor health, unemployment and poor housing. It has a very low ethnic minority population at 0.5% (Sheffield Health: 1998).

Southey Library

Southey library is located near the few shops that serve the estate. It provides adult and children's fiction and non-fiction and videos as well as a collection of council information and reference works. The library building also houses a community room used by a number of groups. At present there are no public access computers in the library. However, the library should be getting six computers within the next year as part of the People's Network initiative. The library is open four days a week, but the opening hours on these days are limited with no lunchtime opening, open no later than 6pm and half day on Saturday.

Parson Cross

Parson cross falls into the same ward as Southey Green and, as such, shares many of the same socio-economic features.

Parson Cross Library

The Parson Cross Library occupies a greater space than Southey Library, and there is, in effect, a separate children's library. However, it generally

has a shabbier and more run down appearance. It does not share its premises with any other groups, although the Book start team has an office there and the credit union meets in the library on Saturdays. It has similar stock to Southey, but has a larger collection of videos. Like Southey, it is only open for 22 hours per week and, as yet, has no public access computer provision.

Stocksbridge

While Stockbridge is located 10 miles from the centre of Sheffield and has its own town council, it still falls within the city boundaries and is part of Sheffield. Stocksbridge is a more affluent area, ranking 3140 out of 8141 on the Indices of Deprivation 2000 and, as such, has lower than the city average numbers claiming income support, lower numbers of unemployed and non-home owners (Sheffield Health: 1998).

Stocksbridge Library

Stockbridge library is located in a two storey building on the main street. The library operates from the second floor with a community room, advice centre and staff rooms using the bottom floor. A number of community groups operate from within the library including children's information services. As a branch library it is larger than Southey and Parson Cross and has larger collections of all materials. The library is open 36 hours a week, closed on Wednesdays and Saturday afternoon.

4. 4 Data Analysis

Given the relatively small number of questionnaires, it was felt that analysing the quantitative results through Excel spreadsheets would be sufficient. Responses were inputted using pre-defined codes. This simple

method of data analysis meant that it was possible to examine simple trends as well as examine relationships between variables.

The qualitative evidence was extrapolated from the user and non-user questionnaires and ordered under a number of themes. Key sections of interviews were transcribed in full and were grouped under the same themed headings. In this way, recurring trends, and just as important, any differences could be easily identified.

The results section will be divided into four chapters to reflect the first four aims of the study. The fifth aim - to establish whether there are any differences in working class library use and needs depending on the location of the library - will be examined within the four results chapters.

4.5 Limitations of the methodology

There are some general limitations to the methodology. While the researcher tried to be objective, both in the overall approach and in selecting people to question, consciously or unconsciously, some bias was likely. Moreover, limited opening hours meant the researcher could not question people at the same times in each library, which could again have led to some bias in the results. In addition, it could be argued that the number of case studies is rather small when examining an issue of this complexity. For example, only one mixed area was examined, which meant that the reliability of the results obtained in Stocksbridge might be problematic as the research was not replicated elsewhere. In addition, the small scale of the study and the limited geographical nature of the research mean that generalisations should be made cautiously as the study is not representative.

However, what may be regarded as the main limitation of this study is the fact that class was not explicitly mentioned. When the interview guides for the library staff were formulated, it was deliberately decided that no explicit mention of class would be made. This was done in order that the issue would be raised by the staff themselves, rather than being prompted to think about it, thus, in a way, refuting or confirming evidence that library staff or authorities are unlikely to address class as an issue (Muddiman et al, 2000).

How far this is actually a limitation of the study is questionable. In some ways not explicitly mentioning the issue of class can be seen to have resulted in some rather vague and general responses. With hindsight, more direct/explicit answers might have been gained if the researcher had mentioned class. However, the lack of direct reference to class by library staff can itself be seen as quite telling. In addition, opinions were expressed that possibly might not have been had the researcher been more direct about the nature of the study.

Chapter 5 Working Class Library Users and Library Use

5.1 Introduction

The first objective of this study was *to examine how working class people use public libraries*. While working class library use has not been examined in any detail, numerous national public library surveys *have* examined frequency of use and type of use by class. Thus, in some ways, due to the small case study design of this research, the findings here may not reveal much *new* information about this subject. However, the value of this part of the research will be examining variations in use in the working class and mixed communities and also comparing these results with national findings.

In order to gain a better understanding of working class library use in these communities, it seems beneficial to provide a breakdown of the class, age and gender of those questioned. Thus, the first part of this chapter will focus on aspects of the profiles of working class library users. The second part of this chapter will examine library usage.

The researcher was aware that questioning about one day's library use would only provide a "snap shot" of library use for that day which may not be representative. Therefore, users were also questioned on the typicality of their visit. In the vast majority of cases, that day's visit was representative of other visits.

5.2 Class Profile of Library Users

5.2.1. Class profile: Southey and Parson Cross

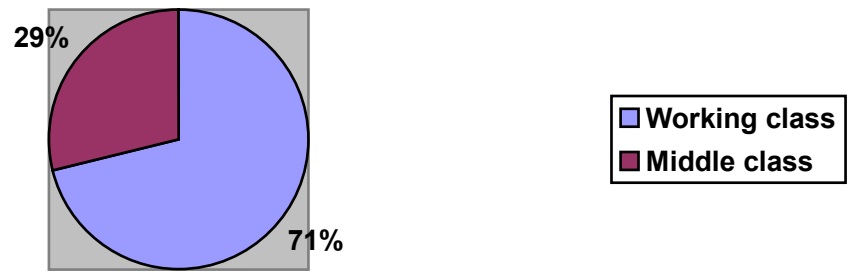


Figure 5.1 Class Profile of Parson Cross and Southey Library Users

Figure 5.1 shows that in both Parson Cross and Southey 27 of the 40 individuals questioned fitted into categories 5,6 and 7 and could therefore be classified as working class. Two individuals in each area were students and so could not be assigned a class group using this scheme and eleven were from what can be broadly termed “middle class” occupations.

In some ways, given the deprived nature of the Southey and Parson Cross, the proportion of middle class users in these areas seems quite high. However, there are two explanations for this. First, those classified as middle class generally worked in lower middle class occupations (class 3 and 4) such as clerical workers or self-employed rather than in class 1 and 2 which cover managerial and professional occupations. Second, the whole premise of this dissertation, middle class individuals are more likely to use the library and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that there was a

disproportionate number of “middle class” people using the library, even in “working class” areas such as these.

5.2.2 Class Profile: Stocksbridge

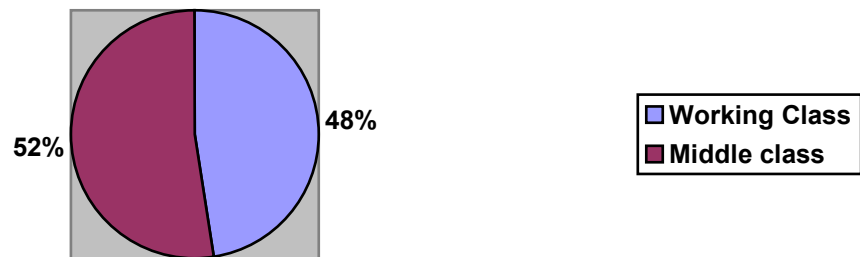


Figure 5 .2 Class profile of Stocksbridge Library Users

Figure 5.2 shows that the Stocksbridge library users questioned were almost equally split with 19 users that could be described as working class and 21 that could be described as middle class.

Those classified as middle class were more likely to be in categories 1 & 2 than at Parson cross and Southey. Those categorised as working class were likely to be in similar occupations to working class individuals at the other two libraries. There was a slight difference, though, in that working class individuals in Stocksbridge were more likely to be employed if they were of working age. Only 10.5 % of respondents were unemployed compared with 14.8% at Southey and 30% at Parson Cross.

5.3 Educational profile of library users

	Parson Cross		Southey		Stocksbridge	
	WC	MC	WC	MC	WC	MC
No formal Qualifications	19 67.9%	0 0	20 71.4%	3 27.3%	10 52.6%	3 14.3%
GCSE D or below	3 10.7%	0 0	3 10.7%	0 0	1 5.3%	0 0
GCSE C or above	4 14.3%	3 27.3%	3 10.7%	5 45.5%	7 33.3%	7 33.3%
A/AS level	0 0	4 36.4%	1 3.6%	2 18.2%	1 5.3%	4 19%
HND	0 0	1 1.9%	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 5.3%
Degree	0 0	1 1.9%	0 0	1 9.1%	0 0	6 31.6%

Table 5.1 Educational attainment of library users

It is clear from table 5.1 that there is a relationship between the respondents' social class and educational achievement; the working class respondents were far less likely to have formal qualifications, especially post-16. Indeed, in all three libraries the majority of working class users have no formal qualifications. This reaches a high of 70% in Southey. In contrast, the middle class respondents are more likely to have formal qualifications and to have these at a higher level.

The above figures reflect findings of a large body of sociological research that has examined the relationship between social class and education, a trend noted in chapter 3. The relationship between class, education and library use has been highlighted in a number of other studies (Bereleson, 1949; Groombridge 1964, Luckham 1971). Indeed, Luckham's findings led

him to conclude “educational background is a more powerful influence than occupation on library membership”.

This study does not focus specifically on a link between library membership and education. However, it is clear in this case that there is a strong correlation between an individual’s class and their level of education. How far it is possible to say that library users in working class communities are better educated than non-library users is less clear, especially given the small sample. There did seem to be a hint that library users were better educated than non-library users. For example, Stocksbridge working class non library users were less likely to have any formal qualifications. However, in Southey, working class library users were slightly more likely than non-library users to have no qualifications.

5. 4 Gender profile of working class library users

Parson Cross		Southey		Stocksbridge	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
10	17	8	19	9	10
37%	63%	29.6%	70.4%	47%	53%

Table 5.2 Gender profile of working class library users

Table 5.2 shows that in all three libraries females can be seen to make up the majority of readers, reflecting recent national trends (Aslib, 1995, Insight, 1999). It should be noted, though, that the split in Stocksbridge is less pronounced than in the other two libraries.

5.5 Age profile of working class library users

Age Range	Parson Cross	Southey	Stocksbridge
16-24	3 11.1%	1 3.7%	2 10.5%
25-34	2 7.4%	4 14.8%	1 5.3%
35-44	5 18.5%	3 11.1%	5 18.5%
45-54	4 14.8%	1 3.7%	3 15.8%
55-65	3 11.1%	4 14.8%	5 18.5%
65+	10 37%	14 52%	3 15.8%

Table 5.3 Age range of working class library users

Table 5.3 shows that the majority of working class users questioned in all three libraries were older people. This was especially the case in Parson Cross and Southey. Opportunity sampling meant that no attempt was made to gain a true reflection of the community, but staff comments confirmed that older users made up a significant proportion of their library users. These figures for use reflect Bohme & Spiller (1999) findings that while, only making up 26% of the population, the over 55s accounted for 43% of visits.

It is also worth noting that, although not part of this study, children made up a substantial number of the library users in all three libraries, children's book issues accounting for about a third of total book issues in each library. This may explain why, although the numbers of working age people using the library don't seem particularly low, staff commented that few in this age group used the library.

We don't see many adults between the ages of 25-55. It could be because we are not open when they are not at work. On Saturday 9-12.30 there is a greater mix, but generally we don't see the middle age band.

The figures indicate that older teenagers and young working class adults were less likely to use the library. Again staff also commented on this. These findings also reflect a general trend in teenage use, although teenage children of individuals in social class AB are more likely to continue to use the library than those in lower social classes.

5.6 Frequency of library use

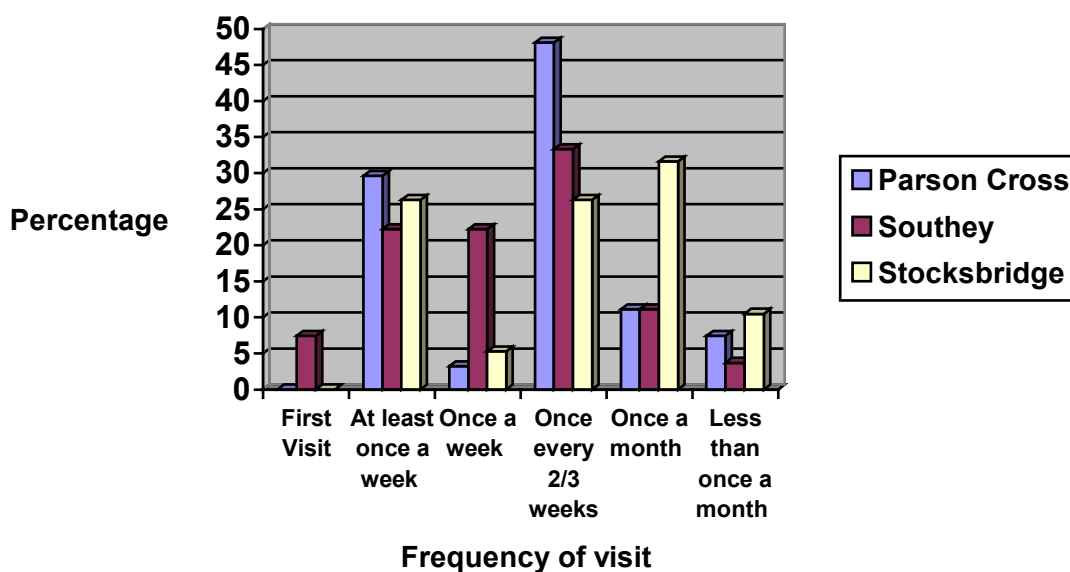


Figure 5.3 Frequency of Public Library Use

Figure 5.3 shows that the majority of the working class respondents either use the library at least once a week or more, or, alternatively, every two to three weeks. Stocksbridge library has a significant number of working class users visiting the library once a month or less 42.1%. This contrasts with

Parson Cross and Southey where a minority of those questioned (18.5% and 14.8% respectively) are what Aslib (1995) would class as “infrequent users”.

These usage figures for Parson Cross and Southey in particular are generally higher than the national average where the majority of users (23%) use the library about once a month (Book Marketing Limited, 1996). Only 26% of users nationally used the library about once a fortnight which is in stark contrast to Southey and Parson Cross where over 75% of users used the library at least every two-three weeks.

However, while the frequency of library use seems comparatively high in this area, it is not abnormal. A Comedia study (1993) focusing on two libraries on large deprived housing estates found that in the first library more than half of the library users had visited the library in the past two weeks, while in the second library seventy-five per cent of users had used the library in the past two weeks.

There does then seem to be a difference in frequency of use in the two different communities. However, it is unclear how far this difference in usage could be attributed to the social make-up of the area. The lower frequency usage in Stocksbridge could be because Stocksbridge library services quite a wide geographical area, including a number of rural communities whose residents may find it difficult to access the library. Alternatively, it could be that the more affluent nature of the area means that Stocksbridge offers a greater range of leisure activities. Further investigation would be needed before any conclusions could be drawn.

5.7 Type of Library use

	Parson Cross		Southey		Stocksbridge	
	Working Class (27)	Middle Class (11)	Working Class (27)	Middle Class (11)	Working Class (19)	Middle Class (21)
Borrow or return books	22 81.5%	9 81.8%	23 85.2 %	9 63.2%	12 63.2%	15 71.4%
Borrow or return videos	7 25.9 %	2 18.2%	9 33.3 %	5 26.3%	5 26.3%	5 23.8%
Use reference material	1 3.7%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 9.5%
Read Newspapers or magazines	1 3.7%	1 9.1%	0 0	1 5.3%	1 5.3%	1 4.8%
Check notice boards or community information	2 7.4%	1 9.1%	1 3.7%	1 5.3%	1 5.3%	3 14.3%
Use library to study read	0 0	1 9.1%	1 3.7%	2 10.5%	2 10.5%	0 0
Attend a meeting or event	1 3.7%	0 0	1 3.7%	0 0	0 0	2 9.5%
Ask Staff for information	1 3.7%	2 18.2%	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 9.5%
Other	1 3.7%	0 0	0 0	1 5.3%	1 5.3%	3 14.3%

Table 5.4 Library use by library and by class

5.7.1 Book borrowing

The majority of working class library users at each library were using the library to borrow or return books either as the sole activity or combined with

another activity. Book borrowing activities accounted for 81.5%, 85.2% and 63.2%, of visits at Parson Cross, Southey and Stocksbridge respectively. This was also the most popular use of the library with middle class users, although the numbers using the library for this purpose was slightly higher than for working class users. In addition, these results can also be seen to reflect general trends that for all classes book borrowing is the most popular library activity (Insight, 1999; Aslib, 1995) and more specifically Bohme & Spiller's (1999) findings that while ABC1 make up 44% of the population they account for 51% of book borrowing.

5.7.2 Weight of book borrowing

No attempt was made to record the number of books borrowed by each user as this was deemed too detailed for this study. However, statistics were obtained which outlined the book issues for the previous year from each of the libraries. While these were not weighted for population size, there can still be seen to be significant differences in the weight of book borrowing. Print issues in Southey and Parson Cross were around half those in Stocksbridge (Sheffield, 2002) reflecting Creaser and Sumison's (1995) research which found that the book issues were lower in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation.

5.7.3 Video borrowing

There did not seem to be a clear middle class/working class divide in video borrowing in any of the three libraries. Rather, the figures for video borrowing seem to be more related to the library than the class of the user. Thus, Southey had the highest numbers of both middle and working class individuals borrowing videos. This finding, that there are not any great differences between video borrowing use by class, is reflected elsewhere. Bohme & Spiller (1999) found that those in social group C2 D and E's

borrowed proportionally the same amount of audio/visual (AV) material as ABC1s.

5.8 Non-borrowing use

Non-borrowing use of the library was a less popular activity. Only, 25% of working class users at Southey, 17.9% at Parson Cross and 26.4% at Stocksbridge used the library partly or solely for non-borrowing purposes. This contrasts with the middle class non-borrowing use, which in all three cases was significantly higher. This was most notable in Stocksbridge where 61.9% of middle class users used the library for non-borrowing purposes either alone or in addition to borrowing. Overall, middle class users were more likely to use reference materials, read newspapers and look at community information and notice boards. However, they were less likely to attend a community event.

The figures for working class non-borrowing use contrast notably with Coughlan's (2001:31) study into this subject where she found "85% of total respondents used the library for a combination of borrow/related and other activities". It is not totally clear why there should be *such* a large discrepancy between this study and the present one. However, it is noted that the libraries she studied served quite diverse ethnic minority communities, the impact of which on non-borrowing use was a "crucial consideration" of the study. Popular non-borrowing activities in these libraries included reading foreign language newspapers and looking at notice boards, suggesting that these libraries had a role as a sort of "cultural centre" in these communities, a role that libraries in this study, especially Southey and Parson Cross did not have.

Generally though, these relatively low figures for working class non-borrowing use reflect wider trends. National studies have revealed that

non-borrowing use is less frequent amongst working class individuals. In 1998 those in social class C2, D and E make only 39 % of “other visits” despite making up 48% of the population (Bohme & Spiller, 1999).

Unexpressed non-borrowing use

Although expressed non-borrowing use was low, interviews with staff revealed that a visit to the library was often more than just about borrowing books. Most notably, although few people said that they used the library as a meeting or social place, it was acknowledged by library staff that the library did serve this function, especially for the elderly users.

We do find that older people come into the library on a social basis really, even if they don't take out many books

The regulars know us all and I think some of the older people, come two or three times a week. I think they come because it's somewhere to come to, it's somewhere to be with other people for a short while.

These comments echo findings from Aslib (1995) that older people value libraries as a safe and welcoming space. This is a type of non-borrowing use working class people are making of the library. It is not easily quantifiable and thus, could, in part, explain why working class non-borrowing use is low.

There does not seem to be any research evidence in the literature that elderly working class individuals have weaker networks of family or friends, thus necessitating this kind of use. However, Coleman (1981) suggests that elderly people living in working class areas are more likely to use libraries as a social haven because “many experience social isolation as a

result of death of a spouse, relatives and friends and the decay of the area in which they live”.

5.9 Summary

In many ways the findings in this chapter served to both confirm and challenge findings of previous research into the profile of library users.

The research revealed that many of the working class individuals using the libraries had few or no formal qualifications. While this finding may cause concern in educational circles, it can be regarded as an affirmation of the public library service. Proctor and Bartle (2002:46) whose research made similar findings, noted that the fact that people with no formal qualifications are using the library service is “reassuring “, confirming the “penetration of the library service into the whole community”.

What perhaps could be regarded as a concern is the relatively low use of the library by working class older teenagers and young adults in all three areas. At around 17% this is 8% less than national figures for library use for 15-34 year olds (Bohme & Spiller, 1999). At present, all the libraries are focused on increasing membership among young children through the Bookstart project. What these figures suggest is that sustaining the reading habit may be harder, especially for those from non-reading backgrounds.

It can be seen that the working class individuals in working class areas were using the library more frequently than the national averages for library use. However, these figures compare favourably with previous research which has focused on frequency of use in similar working class communities.

The findings show that working class individuals were slightly less likely to borrow books than the middle class respondents and significantly less likely to use the library for non-borrowing purposes. However, it was noted that the library might be serving a valuable role outside borrowing uses that is not always obvious even to library users. Book issue figures for the libraries also suggest that weight of use is also affected by the socio-economic profile of the area.

There did not seem to be any particularly significant differences in the type of library use depending on the area. However, it was interesting to note that fewer working class people in Stocksbridge were using the library for book borrowing than in Southey and Parson Cross. This seems likely to be the case because there was a greater amount of choice in the range of non-borrowing use of the library available.

Chapter 6 Barriers to working class library use

6.1 Introduction

A key objective of the study was to *identify the barriers to working class public library use*. Numerous studies past and present have indicated that working class people are less likely to be members of a library than middle class people (For example, Bereleson, 1949, Luckham; 1971, Groombridge; Aslib, 1995, Bohme & Spiller: 1999). In addition, there is also evidence that, if a working class individual is a member of a library, they are likely to use it less often than someone who is middle class (Bohme & Spiller, 1999). Given the continued significance of these class based trends in library use, it was thought that this would be an issue worth exploring at a case study level.

6.2 Barriers to library membership

In order to establish why working class people were not members of the library, short questionnaires were conducted with 20 non-users in the vicinity of each of the libraries in Southey and Stocksbridge.

6.2.1 Institutional Culture

It has been argued by a number of more radical commentators that working class people don't use libraries because they are intimidated by the middle class culture of the library and its staff (Pateman, 2000). According to Muddiman (1999) "working class non users of public libraries...point to the institutional culture of the public library as a barrier to use...for many, public libraries continue to be associated with a white, middle class, academic culture which alienates many disadvantaged people".

Clearly, ascertaining intimidation is quite difficult to do as people are reluctant to admit such feelings therefore these types of questions are likely to be prone to normative answers (Bailey, 1994). However, there was some indication from the responses given by working class non-users in response to questions about the staff and atmosphere in libraries that this thesis may have some credence:

It's (the library) not that welcoming because it's quiet and you have to watch what you say. (Working class male, 25-34, unemployed)

The staff are not very approachable. A librarian expects us to approach them don't they (Working class, female, 35-44, employed)?

It's such a quiet, sombre place (Working class, female, 35-44, employed)

They are quite boring really, but they are libraries aren't they (Working class female, 16-24, unemployed)

A member of the library staff at Parson Cross gave a personal insight into the non-library use of her mother who lives on the estate, recognising that the traditional image of libraries could be off putting to many people in the area.

Even with my mum, until I started working here, she didn't come into the library. People think you have to be quiet. I think those types of library are putting people off.

These findings mirror a range of findings from previous research into barriers to library use, including Linley and Usherwood's (1998: 83) conclusions that "for some users there were still significant psychological barriers to using the library, because of negative perceptions of libraries,

rules, culture and atmosphere". More specifically, non-user's perceptions about the quietness of libraries are markedly similar to Totterdell and Bird's (1976:125) findings: "The atmosphere of libraries was frequently mentioned unfavourably, particularly in terms of silence and problems this gave rise to". The comments also confirm Aslib's (1995:144) research that "non users predominantly suspect that the public library ...has an unchanging image", a finding echoed by research from the General Consumer Council of Northern Ireland (1995) which found that almost a fifth of non-users agreed with the statement that "the library service is old fashioned and stuffy".

While Muddiman (1999) has previously cited some of the above research in support of arguments about the issue of institutional culture, it should be noted that none of the studies cited above examined user perceptions specifically in relation to class. Thus, it is not possible to tell how far in these cases that the comments can be attributed to working class individuals. However, given that the majority of non-users are working class, it seems logical to conclude that at least some working class people have expressed similar sentiments to this.

The perceptions of a number of the respondents that libraries are restrictively quiet places are interesting but also quite perturbing if public libraries want to attempt to encourage more individuals in who wouldn't ordinarily use the library. Johnston's (1956:69) warning about the importance of ensuring that libraries have a welcoming environment nearly fifty years ago seems just as relevant today; "A public library with the look and general atmosphere of a mausoleum may have a splendid collection ...but will open a door to escape only to the minority of the bold and resolute".

Institutional Culture: Library Materials

There also seemed to be a perception amongst working class non-users that libraries only provided certain types of material and therefore the content of libraries was irrelevant to their interests.

I don't need it. I just read Mills and Boon (Working class, female, 45-54, retired).

This comment is indicative of a significant, though minority, perception amongst non-library users that “the library is only for well educated people” (General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, 1995). What seems particularly ironic, though, is that all three libraries had a significant collection of Mills and Boon type books, no doubt responding to the fact that the average library user is likely to be an older female, who enjoys romance and family sagas (Insight, 1999). Moreover, staff seemed positive about library users reading such books.

Quite a few mums that have brought children in, that don't read have started to read and have sort of started Mills and Boons and then they have moved onto Catherine Cookson which I think is really a step up. We have had one or two that have done that. I have been pleased with that, to think that they are actually getting to like reading.

Thus, while public library users know that attempts are made to cater for all abilities and tastes, it is clear that a lack of understanding about the types of services libraries provide may lead non-users to think that the library service is not for them. It seems important then that, when libraries are marketing their services, it would be useful for them to include basic information about the types of reading materials that are available.

Institutional culture- Staff perceptions

Library staff also acknowledged that using a library could be quite an intimidating experience for some of the people living in their communities. Library staff at Parson Cross and Southey seemed particularly aware of this:

In this area, people sometimes find it very hard to go across the threshold of a library because it might be completely out of their experience.... a bit daunting....

It could be argued that people are not going to libraries because it is an alien environment

These responses, focusing on the cultural differences between the library and the communities they serve, contrast with those of staff in Stocksbridge who did not think that non-use of the library was because individuals felt intimidated.

I haven't really come across that sort of feeling (intimidation)...I think a lot of people see it (the library) as a vital part of the community.

However, there was an acknowledgement that people with literacy problems might find using the library more difficult and that this was thought likely to affect whether they used the library or not.

I don't think we have got as many adult literacy or basic skills types problems as Southey or Parson Cross and I think that might have an effect on whether people use the library.

Thus, educational ability rather than explicitly cultural or class differences was regarded by library staff as an important factor in determining library use and non-use. As has already been discussed in Chapter 4, there is a link between class and education and thus, in some ways, the comments of staff at Stocksbridge can be seen to acknowledge this. However, focusing only on educational ability or illiteracy as the reason for non-use could obscure the issue of low library usage by certain groups. Moreover, Pateman (1999) notes that a reluctance to acknowledge the issue of class could “lead to inappropriate action being taken”.

The greater awareness of the possibility of intimidation felt by working class individuals at Southey and Parson Cross, compared with Stocksbridge, seems to be a result of the socio-economic differences of the communities. While it was acknowledged that there were “pockets of deprivation” in Stocksbridge, the town as a whole was not characterised by poverty like Southey and Parson Cross.

While class was never explicitly mentioned by library staff at any of the sites, words such as “deprived” and “poor” were used by staff to describe the individuals and communities at Southey and Parson Cross. This indicates that staff at these sites had a greater awareness of, if not specifically class differences in their community, then general socio-economic differences that might affect library use. Moreover, the fact that these differences were barely mentioned in Stocksbridge suggests that in a mixed community, low working class library use may be more of a hidden issue.

Non-library members who use the library

It was clear from the evidence, though, that not all working class non-library members hadn't joined because they felt uncomfortable in a library

environment. Notably, In Stocksbridge, a number of working class individuals without library membership regularly visited the library to attend social events.

I go to the coffee morning; they (staff) are very helpful. They always have a smile on their face which can be a bit unusual these days (Working class male, 55-64, employed).

I've been in for the coffee morning and they seem fine in there. (Working class female, 55-64, look after house)

Others seemed comfortable using the library, even if they were not members:

I've been in a couple of times to look at information when I was doing my driving test. (Working class female, 45-54, employed)

I take my grandson in (Working class female, 65+, retired)

In all cases, the attitude towards the library seemed generally positive. This seems to indicate that their lack of membership was a result of factors other than alienation from the library environment. These findings would seem to support research by the General Consumer Council of Northern Ireland (1995) that found that only 3% of non-users said they did not use libraries because they felt intimidated. However, it should be noted that the same survey indicated that 10% of non-users said that they did not use libraries because they did not like them, which could suggest intimidation. In addition, the relatively low numbers citing reasons related to intimidation might be quite low because not just working class people were surveyed.

The use of the library by non-library members at Stocksbridge may also have something to do with Stockbridge Library; it is very much a centre of the community with lots of events going on and groups using the space. While these events are not always directly related to the library, their location in the library means that non-library members enjoy a positive experience of the library. Southey and Parson Cross libraries are not such centres of the community, and, while they do have some other groups using their premises, generally people would be unlikely to use the library for any other purpose than library related ones. It is notable that no one at Southey gave a similar response to non-users at Stocksbridge.

Thus, it seems that until the libraries in Parson Cross and Southey become what Aslib (1995) calls “landmarks of the community” they are likely to remain an alien environment which some people living in the area would find difficult to enter. This is despite the fact that the libraries at Southey and Parson Cross are relatively small, low level buildings, situated near other local amenities. What would appear even more difficult would be persuading working class people on these estates to visit the better resourced central library. These tend to be architecturally more dominating and physically larger thus creating greater psychological barriers. As Jo Hendry, Chief Librarian of Renfresshire district Council dramatically put it:

“The physical aspects of the buildings, grand with wide steps- well some of these posh new classical buildings make you feel like you are going to meet God” (quoted in Hughes, 1991:12).

6.2.2 Lack of interest in reading

However, while comments were made that suggested intimidation and thus could be tackled by libraries (Insight, 1999), the most commonly cited reason for not being a member of the library given by working class non-

users is that they do not have any interest in reading. About a third of working class non-users in both Southey and Stocksbridge gave answers such as those below.

I just don't read. I have never been interested in going in (Working class male, 65+ retired)

I don't like reading (Working class female, 16-24, unemployed)

I don't do a great deal of reading. I generally just watch T.V (Working class, male, 55-64, employed)

I'm not that interested in reading (Working class female, 65+, retired)

I'm not an avid reader (Working class male, 45-54, retired)

Staff in both communities suggested lack of interest in reading as a barrier to library use.

It's an area who don't read.

One staff member highlighted the importance of being brought up in reading culture as a key encouragement to library use:

There are people who don't come from a family background of reading and library use they just carry on in the same way. I have always read because my mum and dad always read and my granddad always read and everyone in our family has always read, my children read. But we get them people who don't have that background so they don't bother coming to the library.

The numbers of non-users giving this reason for not using the library, while due to the small sample, could clearly not be called representative, are significantly greater than other statistics. Bohme & Spiller's (1999) research indicates that only 15% of non-users didn't use the library due to the fact that they didn't like reading. However, 38% of working class individuals cited the more ambiguous "no need or no reason to go" which seems to cover a multitude of reasons for non-membership including those associated with a dislike of reading. Indeed, it has been noted that, "it is likely that some reasons for non-use are a consequence of other factors" (General Consumer Council of Northern Ireland, 1995:28).

It is simple enough to use these comments about dislike of reading to refute the arguments of commentators such as Pateman and Muddiman that libraries are failing the working class. It can be argued that working class individuals simply don't need libraries because they don't read. However, this seems too simplistic, ignoring, among other things, the fact that libraries have additional functions to providing books. Moreover, given the present government's social exclusion agenda, especially in regard to libraries since the publication of *Libraries for all* (DCMS, 1999), it does not seem politically sensible for library authorities to ignore low working class library use. Having said this, it is worth noting that at present the working class are only specifically targeted as a group in 6% of authorities (Muddiman et al, 2000).

What seems more useful is to explore, in greater depth, why working class individuals are more likely than middle class users to cite dislike of reading as a reason not to be a member of the library. It could be that a dislike of reading is a result of reading difficulties. It was recently estimated that around 20 % of the population are functionally illiterate (Literacy Trust, 2002), that is they are unable to "understand and employ printed information in daily life, at home, at work and in the community" (OECD, 1996, cited in Literacy Trust, 2002).

Indeed, it is clear that functional illiteracy is more likely to affect working class individuals. As Vincent (2000), notes “class is still often ignored as the key influence on literacy”. While Vincent’s statement ignores a perhaps more dynamic relationship between literacy and class, it nonetheless suggests why working class people may not like reading and therefore not use libraries. Almost by definition, those in working class jobs are likely to have less formal education, as those occupations defined as working class require less formal educational qualifications. In order to minimise the impact of literacy differentials on library use, libraries could provide suitable material and literacy initiatives.

However, it may be that some working class individuals’ lack of interest in reading and more specifically in literature may be a result of cultural rather than educational differences associated with class. Roach and Morrison (1998) argue that libraries lack ‘cultural relevance’ to many ethnic minority communities as they don’t address these people’s needs, a finding which Muddiman (1999:5) posits may “be applied more generally to a wide range of working class communities and disadvantaged groups”. In a similar vein, Hughes (1991:31) notes that ‘cultural fear’, “a kind of fear that prevents people from exploring the arts”, may be a reason why working class people are less interested in reading.

Lahav (1989) acknowledges that, for many working class people, reading is regarded as purely middle class, and because of this link is likely to be shunned as an activity. Indeed, John Edmunds, General Secretary of the GMB union suggested that an interest in reading could have adverse consequences in social and work situations: “In many working class organisations, to actually have a knowledge of literature acts as a barrier rather than anything else” (quoted in Hughes, 1991: 32).

6.2.3 Lack of time

Lack of time was also another commonly cited reason for not using the library with a change of circumstances often being cited as the reason for not being a member:

I was (a member) until quite recently...but since I have been a grandma I haven't had time. (Working class, female, 45-54, looks after house)

I don't do much reading. I don't have time now. (Working class female, 45-54, employed)

I haven't got time at the moment. (Working class female, 45-54, unemployed)

I haven't got time to go (Working class female, 45-54, look after house)

These responses correspond with various national research which cites this as the second and third most common reason for non-library use (for example, Aslib, 1995; Bohme & Spiller, 1999) However, how far this can be seen as a genuine reason in all cases is questionable. A later question in the questionnaire, "do you read?" revealed that a number of those who said they didn't have time to go to the library didn't actually read books.

Of course there is the possibility that they would use the library for other purposes. However, it may be that it is regarded as more socially acceptable thing to say. Nauratil (1985:10) notes that asking people about their library use may result in normative answers because library use is regarded highly as a "positive and even virtuous activity".

6.2.4 Ill Health

Health problems were another reason commonly cited by the elderly working class as a reason for not being a member.

I'm diabetic and have eye problems. (Working class female, 65+, retired)

When I found out I was partially blind I stopped. (Working class female, 65+, retired)

I haven't been in the last 12 or 15th months because I've been ill. I went at odd times before that. (Working class male, 55-64, retired)

In this study, ill health was only cited by working class people as a reason for not using the library. However, Aslib's (1995: 119) research suggests that this is not such a class based phenomena as an age one: "Among older users there is a dichotomy. People in the 60 + age group either use libraries frequently or not at all depending on their interests, eyesight and mobility". However, research indicates that working class individuals are more likely to have ill health problems (McGill, 1985) and, in this way, class can be seen to have an impact on library use.

6.2.5 Other sources

Another reason why working class people do not use libraries is that, like other social groups, they get their books and videos from other sources. All of the non-readers who did read said that they bought themselves books.

I buy my own books and magazines (Working class female, 25-34, look after the house).

That working class people buy books rather than borrow them is perhaps not that surprising. There has been an increasing availability of cheaper books in shops and supermarkets. In addition, there are companies which are keen to cash in on this untapped market. *The Book People*, a company specialising in heavily discounted books, can be seen to have working class people as a target audience, aiming as they do, “to sell books to people who thought books weren't for them” (Garfield 2002).

6.3 Barriers to increased library use.

Recent statistics show that working class individuals are less likely to visit the library than middle class individuals. Figures at Stocksbridge library illustrate this. Middle class library users were almost twice as likely to visit the library once a week than working class users.

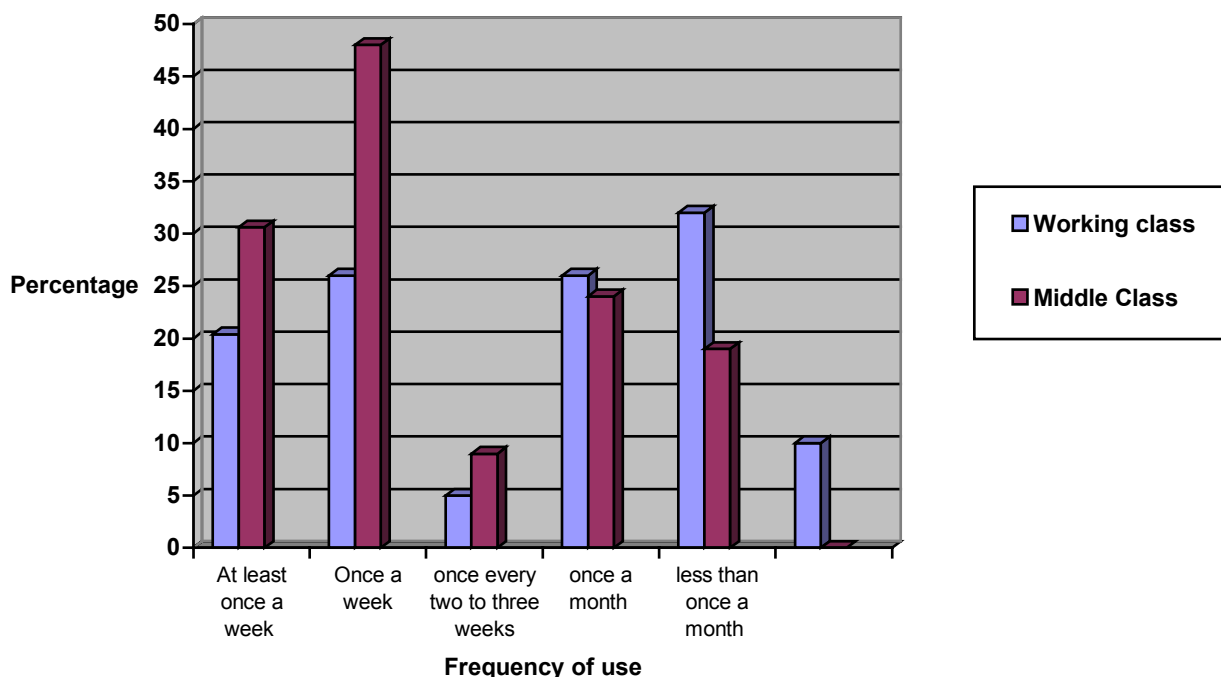


Figure 6.1 Frequency of Library Use in Stocksbridge by Class

In addition, they were more likely to visit the library at least once a week and less likely to visit less frequently than working class users. There did not seem to be one overriding reason as to why this would be the case. Library users did give a number of explanations as to why.

6.3.1 Personal reasons

A number of users cited personal circumstance to explain that they could not attend the library more regularly. These were generally as a result of their own or spouse's ill health for elderly users.

My body! I don't get out much and I have to rely on special transport.

(Working class female, 65+, retired)

Work commitments were more likely to be a barrier for younger library users, in particular irregular patterns of work.

My job, I work nights. (Working class male, 25-34, employed)

I work shifts and the library is only open in the daytime. (Working class male 16-24, employed).

Work and the fact that it is closed Wednesdays. (Working class female, 45-54, employed)

On the face of it these reasons do not seem particularly class based. However, as mentioned above, working class people are more likely to suffer from ill health problems. In addition, working class individuals are more likely to work in occupations with unsociable hours including weekends and evenings (Labour Research, 2002).

6.3.2 Lack of stock selection

More of an issue seemed to be lack of sufficient stock selection. A number of readers had commented that they had read all the books that they had wanted to in the library which some explicitly stated as a barrier to coming to the library more often. Northern Ireland General Consumer Council (1995) research results show that a range of book stock is the most important aspect of service provision and is regarded as the most important thing.

I have read all the books I want. They don't seem to have enough here.

(Working class female, 55-64, employed)

I have been coming a long time and have just about read everything.

(Working class female, 45-54, unemployed)

Staff recognised lack of stock selection as an issue that prevented library users from using the library more regularly. Sheffield may be particularly problematic in this respect, as the area has suffered from cuts and lack of investment in library services.

The quality of the stock leaves a lot to be desired, especially in non-fiction. You could argue that why should people come in if we are not offering them what they want.

Lack of stock selection can be a problem. Sometimes people come in and have a look around and go without borrowing anything...that bothers me. We have had a couple of lean years.

However, while lack of stock selection may be keeping working class people from using the library more regularly, it should be noted that middle

class individuals in both libraries also commented on the poor stock selection as a reason for not visiting the library more often.

6.3.3 Opening times.

Opening hours were also cited as a reason for not being able to visit more frequently by a number of users. This can be seen as being a particular problem in Southey and Parson Cross where both libraries are only open 22 hours a week, shut at lunch times and with only one “late night” open until six. Stocksbridge library, as a branch library fares, slightly better, open 36 hours a week, including lunch times and with a “late night” opening until 7 p.m.

However, while some users cited this as a barrier to use, it was debated by staff as to how far extending the opening hours would increase library use, especially in Southey and Parson Cross

We could be open twelve hours a day everyday and still perhaps wouldn't increase our issues. If you have another night it might still not be that busy. People do things at certain times and they do get used to what your opening hours are

Opening hours could perhaps encourage a few more, but I don't honestly think it would encourage thousands more. You are either a reader or not a reader.

Without further research, it is not possible to tell what impact longer opening hours would have on these specific libraries. However, research by Proctor et al (1998) showed that that opening hours reduction led to reduced use of the library service.

6.4 Summary

The findings show that there are a number of barriers to library use by working class people, but no one can be seen to particularly dominate. A number of the comments did seem to reinforce the arguments of some critics of public library culture that institutional culture is the key reason for lack of library use by working class non-users. However, only a minority of respondents explicitly expressed this type of comment.

Interestingly, dislike of reading was the most commonly cited reason for not using the library in both Southey and Stocksbridge. This seems to counter critic's claims that libraries are failing working class people, as it seems logical that people do not use a service they have no use for. However, libraries clearly have other purposes than to simply supply reading materials. Thus, it could be argued that the bookish, academic elements of the institutional culture, the "reek of academia" (Pateman, 2002), are what are putting working class people off using libraries for other purposes.

Other reasons cited for non-use did not appear particularly class specific. Lack of time, ill health and obtaining books from other sources were all cited by a number of non-users. These findings corroborate those of Aslib's (1995:123) general research on non-use. "The majority of non-users say that they have no interest or need, or not enough time, or they buy all the books they want".

Thus, while it may be tempting to focus all attention on institutional barriers, it should be recognised that there are a variety of different barriers to library use by this group. Working class non-use cannot be tackled as a single monolithic problem because, just as with any other user group, there are just as many differences as commonalities between users working class and non-users. Having said that, libraries obviously need to tackle

institutional barriers, a fact that *Libraries for all* (DCMS, 1999) acknowledges.

The research findings confirm the trend that working class individuals were less likely to use the library as regularly as middle class users. Reasons for this phenomenon seem less clear. Barriers to additional library use are quite varied and a number of them, such as opening times and poor stock selection, were cited almost equally by middle class and working class users. Moreover, the majority of users did not have a reason why they did not use the library more frequently. Thus, it is suggested that if there are not any actual barriers to increased working class library use, there may be other pull factors keeping people away from libraries.

Chapter 7 The specific library needs of working class people

7.1 Introduction

One of the key objectives of the study was to: *Identify the specific library needs of working class people*. This has been recognised as an area of user needs' research that has been continually neglected and requires investigation (Pateman, 2000; Muddiman, 2000). Establishing a true understanding of needs is acknowledged to be a difficult task. Indeed, a criticism levelled at many user needs' studies, is that they focus too much on levels of satisfaction with existing services, and thus fail to allow users to consider any further or additional roles for the public library (Muddiman, 1999).

However, while it is acknowledged that focusing on users' views of existing services will only provide a partial understanding of their needs, it still seems relevant to examine user's feelings about existing services. As Percy Smith and Sanderson (1992) note: "needs can refer to services that already exist". With this idea in mind, working class library users were questioned about how important a range of existing library services were to them on a Likert scale of one to five, with five being very important. In order to ascertain additional and future needs, library users were then asked if there were any other services the library could provide that would be useful to them.

7.2 Borrowing needs

7.2.1. Fiction

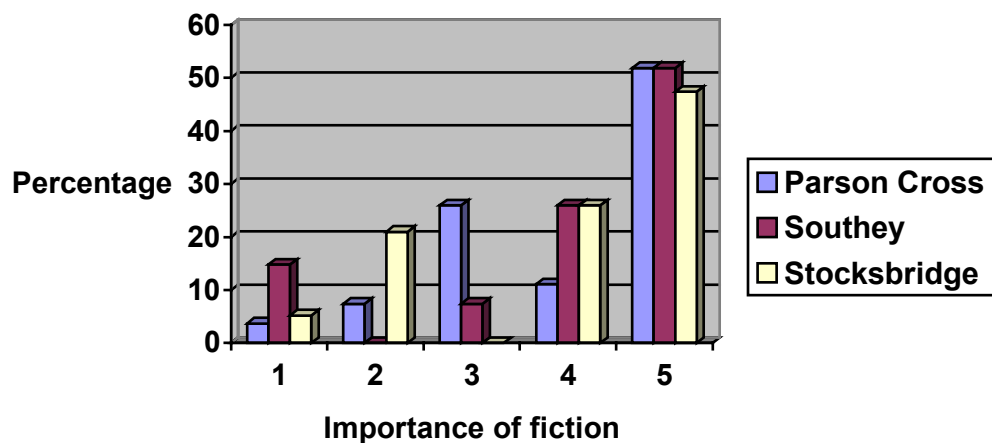


Figure 7.1 The Importance of Fiction to Working Class Library Users

As figure 7.1 shows, access to fiction material is clearly regarded as important by the majority of working class users. Over 60% of users in all libraries regarded borrowing fiction as important or very important. This figure rose to 77.9% of Southey library users.

Entertainment

The main reason users regarded being able to borrow fiction as important was for entertainment:

Books....it's entertainment. (Working class female, 45-54, look after the house)

I'm an avid reader. It's my hobby. I have been doing it for sixty-two years.

(Working class female, 65+ retired).

I can't get about so much, so reading is something to do. (Working class female, 65+, retired)

I enjoy reading. It's good when there's nothing on TV. (Working class male, 45-54, unemployed)

For some, though, the ability to borrow books seemed to have an even greater importance to their lives:

It's a must. I feel like I've got to have a book. (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

I don't know what else I would do and there's nowhere else to get them from. (Working class female, 16-24, employed)

Talking books keep me sane; I'm on my own. I get my work done a lot quicker when I am listening to them. (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

These comments from working class people about the importance of reading as a form of entertainment and escapism can be seen to reflect general findings about why people use libraries (Aslib, 1995, Insight, 1999, Bohme & Spiller, 1999).

More specifically, though, they reflect findings from a Comedia (1993) study which interviewed library users using libraries on similar large housing estates to Parson Cross and Southey. The researchers found that the number of people bringing books back before their due date was so great that they dubbed users as "suffering" from a "reading addiction": "It was a need rather than a want, and the library clearly played a crucial role in many local people's lives, particularly on estates where there were few other leisure choices" (Comedia.1993: 37). Thus, the traditional library services can be regarded as a key need for existing library members.

Cost

Another reason often cited as to why it was important that books could be borrowed from the library was the cost factor.

It's expensive to have to buy. (Working class male, 65+, retired)

It's cheaper than buying. (Working class male, 25-34, unemployed)

Books are expensive and you can't afford to buy. (Working class female, 45-55, look after the house)

It saves having to buy. (Working class female, 35-44, look after the house)

It saves buying them doesn't it? (Working class female, 35-44, employed)

While comments about the issue of cost were not limited to working class people questioned, the fact that a number of working class people highlighted cost as a reason it was important to them to borrow books from the library is, perhaps, not surprising. Income differentials between middle and working class mean that the latter, typically, have less disposable income (Giddens, 1997).

However, interestingly, despite the numbers highlighting the cost factor as to why it was important for them to be able to borrow library books, the majority of working class library users (74% at Parson Cross and Southey and 79% at Stocksbridge) said they bought books and other items available from the library for themselves as well. These findings reflect more general trends that "regular or heavy library users do not *replace* ownership by borrowing, they *add* to it" (England, 1992: 24).

7.2.2 Non-Fiction

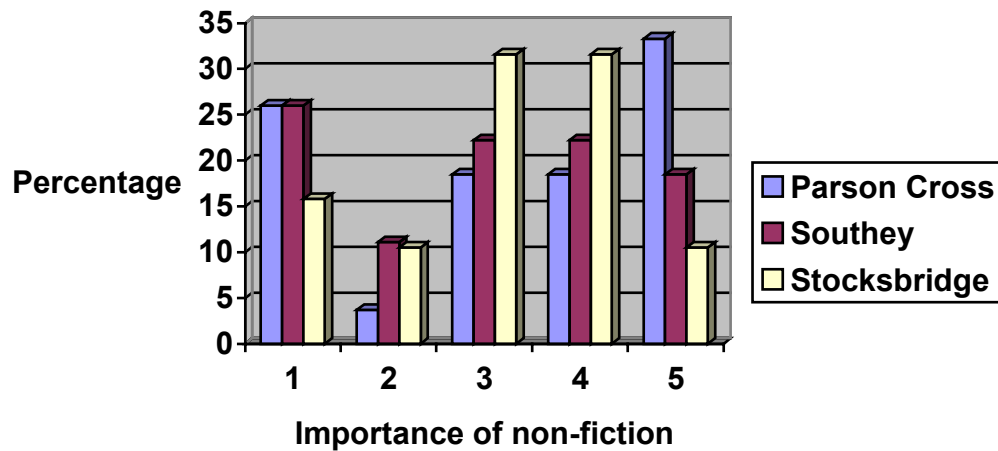


Figure 7.2 The Importance of Non-Fiction to Working Class Library Users

The importance of non-fiction to working class users is less clear-cut. At least 40 % of individuals in all three libraries regarded it as important or very important. However, there was a significant minority at Parson Cross and Southey (26%) who regarded non-fiction as not at all important. These findings are not that surprising. A number of recent surveys have shown that individuals in social class C2 D&E are significantly less likely to borrow non-fiction than those in social class A, B and C1 (Bohme & Spiller, 1999; Insight; 1999).

Comments from staff may reveal why non-fiction is regarded as less important in these two areas especially:

The quality of the stock leaves a lot to be desired, especially in non-fiction.

Non-fiction don't go out as much as they should do largely because the stock is rather tired and we could do with some new titles.

The staff comments suggest that, while the users were not being asked specific questions about the quality of present services, their answers might well be based on what was currently available in the library. Therefore, if there are few non-fiction books that seem relevant to users and those that are in stock are poor quality, it is not surprising that respondents rated this part of the service as less important. Thus, there may well be a need for non-fiction but, as one staff member noted, it is not possible to ascertain this unless the books are there in the first place.

Non-fiction isn't very well used, but then we don't have very much. I don't know if we had a really good collection if people would come in.

There is evidence to suggest, though, that the quality or type of stock on offer may not be the only reason why fewer working class people borrow non-fiction. Slightly fewer working class individuals using Stocksbridge library rated non-fiction important or very important, despite what seemed to the researcher the significant difference in the amount and quality of stock.

Educational value

For those who did value non-fiction, the main reason seemed to be educational, although educational value was also noted in relation to fiction:

I think it educates you. (Working class male, 55-64, unemployed)

It does learn you when you read. (Working class male, 16-24, employed)

You learn a lot from reading, Sometimes someone will ask me something and I can tell them the answer and they say “how do you know that?” and it’s from reading. I know lots from books. (Working class female, 35-44, employed)

A few years ago I did a foundation course. It cost £40 to buy the books but I could get them from the library. (Working class male, 35-44, unemployed)

I get non-fiction out mainly to read up on things. It’s always good to educate yourself. (Working class male, 25-34, employed)

The non-fiction is important for the children to study. (Working class female, 25-34, employed)

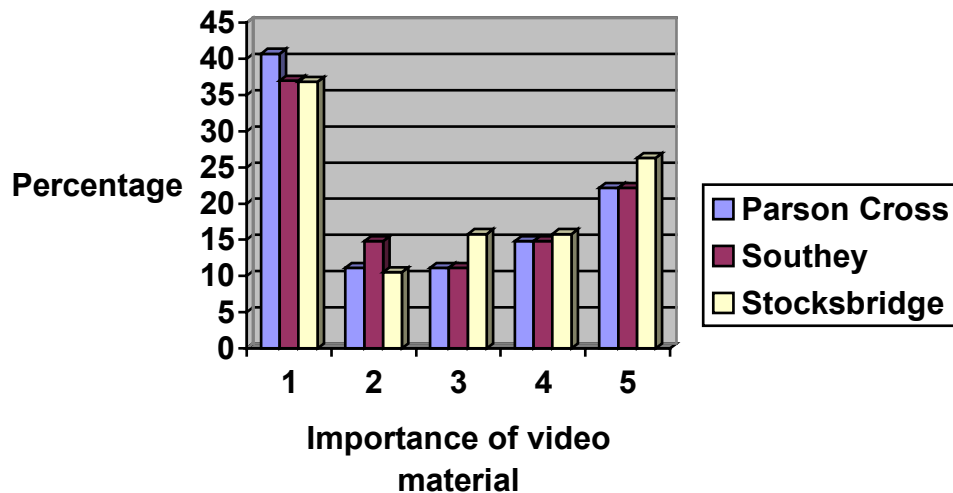
These comments about the educational value of libraries seems to support Muddiman’s (1999:5) argument that working class library users are an “aspirant minority”: “it is that minority of the working class who are socially, educationally or intellectually aspirational who particularly value and use the public library service”.

While the above responses seem to indicate that there is some support for this, how far this is an appropriate label for all the above respondents is questionable. An analysis of the educational information from these respondents reveals that only a couple of them could be classed as “achievers” (people with G.C.S.E grade C and above), the others had lower or no formal qualifications. In addition, a number of the respondents were elderly which, while of course not ruling out continued learning, suggests that they would not be looking to change their class position through education.

Moreover, it should be noted that the majority of respondents did not cite educational or intellectual reasons for using the library. Thus, while for

some the library fulfils an educational need, for the majority of working class individuals the library is fulfilling a recreational role.

7.2.3 Videos



7.3 The Importance of Video Material to Working Class Library Users

There is a clearer trend with regard to the importance of videos and the differences between the libraries seem minimal. In all cases at least 45% of working class users do not rate video material as important, with over 50% at Parson Cross saying that it was not important.

Interestingly, these comments seem to clash with some of the staff's perceptions:

Videos are very popular here.

Videos are really popular. It sounds terrible to say...sometimes we say we are a video shop

Survey statistics show that the above figures reflect a more general trend that only a minority of working class library users borrow videos, 8% of those in social class DE and 11% of those in social class C2. However, this study indicates that the importance of videos to working class people is quite strongly related to age. While an average of less than 25% of the over 34's rated videos as important or very important, 80% of the under 34's using Parson Cross and Southey libraries thought that they were.

These figures contrast with non-class based figures which show that there is not any significant link between a library user's age and their AV borrowing. Bohme & Spiller (1999) findings showed that under 34's make up 47% of the population and borrow 43% of AV while over 34's make up 53 % of the population and borrow 56% of AV material.

One reason why more young working class people value the library as particularly important for borrowing videos is the lack of alternative sources in the area they live in. This seems to be especially true in areas such as Parson Cross and Southey which have few other amenities, especially leisure based ones.

The local video shop shut down a few years ago. When I heard the library has video rental I started coming in here. (Working class female, 25-34, unemployed)

Staff also suggested that there was a link between the lack of alternative sources and high library video issues.

I think it's true to say of all the community libraries in North Group that Parson Cross issues most videos...there isn't a video outlet on the Margetson Road.

Insight (1999) found that introducing audio visual material to the library attracts new users. In addition, the relatively high cost and low availability of other local public leisure services in deprived areas (Bramley, 1997) means that, the public library can become an important leisure resource.

Indeed, the relatively low cost of renting videos from the library was a principal reason why it was important that people could borrow videos from the library was their value for money:

It's cheaper than the big stores. You can get them for a week. It's really good. (Working class female, 16-24, look after the house)

It's cheaper than anywhere else. (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

They keep the children happy. It's handy if you haven't got that many at home. (Working class female, 35-44, look after the house)

However, again it should be noted that this was not a reason exclusively given by working class individuals; a number of the middle class respondents also highlighted the issue of cost.

7.3 Non-borrowing needs

In addition to the borrowing services, each of the three libraries also provides a range of non-borrowing services including reference works,

newspapers and magazines, community and jobs information and hosts events such as the baby time. In order to assess how important these services were to working class users, three service areas that the libraries provided on a similar basis, will be examined in greater detail: reference, staff advice and community information.

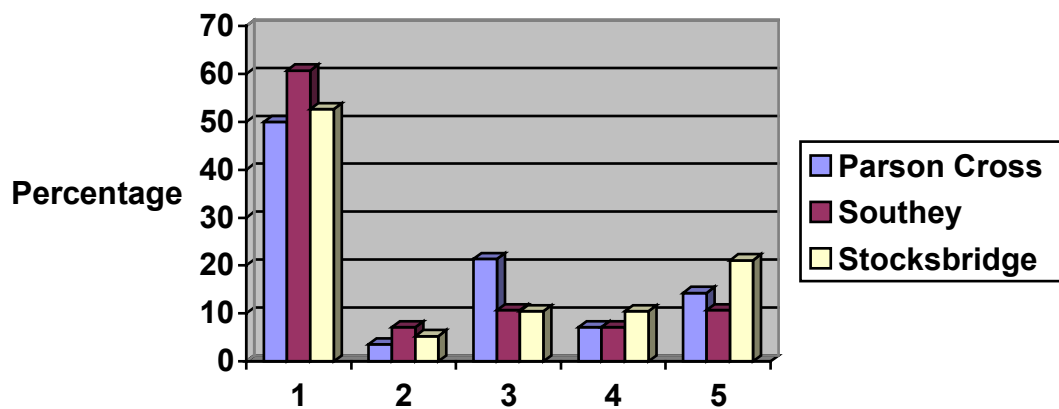


Figure 7.4 The Importance of Reference to Working Class Library Users

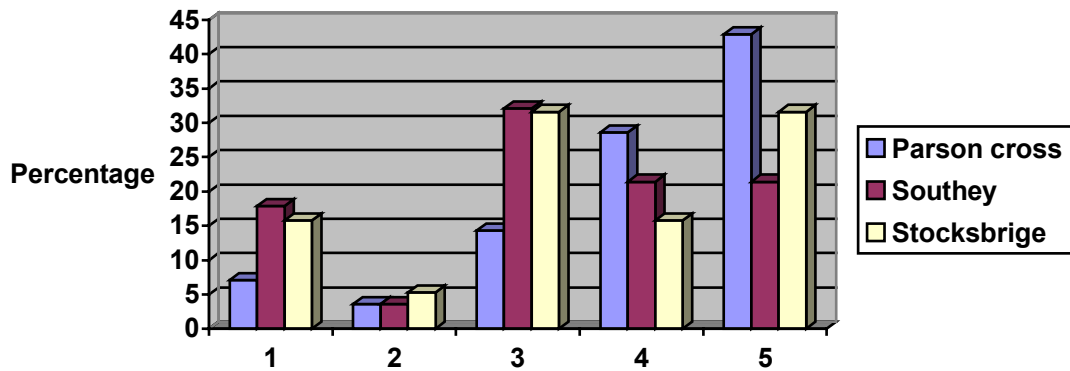


Figure 7.5 The Importance of Advice/Help From Staff to Working Class Library Users

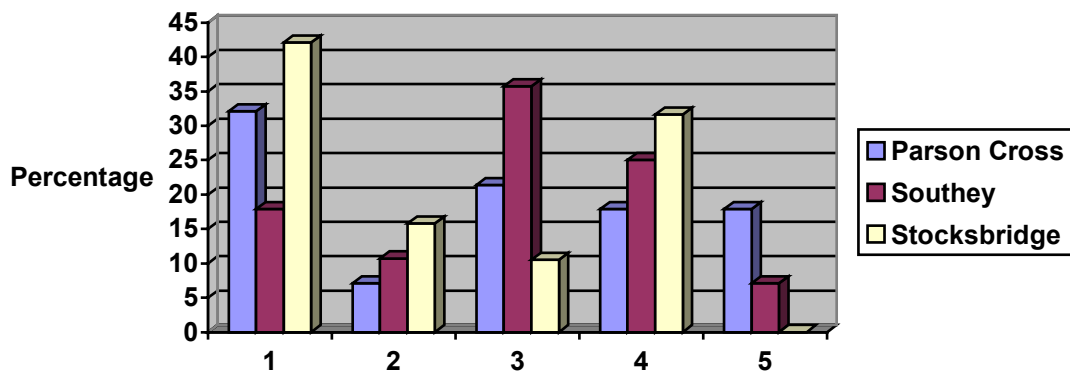


Figure 7.6 The Importance of Notice Boards/Community Information to Working Class Library Users.

Reference

Figure 7.4 indicates that reference materials do not appear to be particularly important to working class users in any of the libraries. At least 50% of users gave it the lowest ranking of not at all important, with this rising to 60% for Southey. There was a significant minority at Stocksbrige, though,

who thought this service was important, with 21% who thought it was very important. These generally low figures are supported by the fact that not one person in any of the libraries was using the library for reference purposes on the days in question.

Importance of advice of help from staff

Figure 7.5 indicates that there was a definite trend towards library users regarding this as an important service. Over 40% of users in all libraries thought that this was an important service, with this rising to over 70% in Parson Cross. Only a minority of users in each library thought that this was unimportant.

Importance of notice boards and community information

Opinions about the importance of notice boards and community information were mixed (Fig. 7.6). There seemed to be a dichotomy at Stocksbridge with a significant percentage either saying that this was not an important service or that it was an important service. The responses at Southey and Parson Cross were quite mixed with however, with slightly more individuals at Parson Cross thinking that this was an important service and slightly more individuals at Southey thinking that this was an unimportant service.

7.4 Future Needs

As well as examining present needs in terms of what is already provided, it is also important to examine what future needs working class people might have. The present government also regards local input as essential in developing a library service that can overcome social exclusion and be welcoming to everyone. Chris Smith, the then Culture Secretary, stated "we want the local community to be involved in developing the range of services

they (libraries) provide” (DCMS, 1999:4). In order to establish what future needs individuals might have, questions were asked if there were any other services the library could provide that would be useful to them.

The majority of those who responded, notably older female users, seemed to find it difficult to think beyond the current service provision.

No...I am quite happy with the service they offer. (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

No...everything is fine for me personally. (Working class female, 65+, retired)

No.... It's nice as it is (Working class female, 55-64, retired).

I don't think it could be improved. (Working class female, 65+, retired)

Others did not seem to feel comfortable making suggestions, despite the fact that the library is a publicly funded service.

It's not for me to say (Working class female, 65+, retired)

These kinds of responses were not unexpected; moreover, they were not confined to working class users as middle class users gave similar responses. Harris, (1998:10) in his study into community perceptions of the social benefits of public libraries, noted that when he tried to get people to envisage community and social roles for the library “ their concentration wandered and contributions faltered at this point”. The responses of these library users suggest a similar reluctance or inability to see beyond the current library provision.

It is clear, though, that there are many different types of projects and initiatives that public libraries could implement that could benefit working class users. Matassaro (1998) focused on over 18 “impressive” UK wide projects that highlighted the social potential of public libraries in six different areas, including social development, health and well being. While none of the case study libraries had any specific projects aimed at adults such as those described above, they all hosted a “babytime” as part of Bookstart, a national project aimed at getting young children interested in reading.

However, while it is clear that these kinds of outreach initiatives can be very valuable to their communities and attract a non-traditional clientele (Nauratil, 1985), research has shown that generally this is not regarded as a vital element of the library service by either library users, non-users or staff (General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, 1995).

While there was generally support amongst the staff for such outreach work, there was some evidence of a reluctance to participate in outreach. One member of staff questioned the fact that the library hosted a weekly Bookstart “babytime” event:

With Bookstart the idea is to get them in to borrow books, but they don't. I suppose we are serving the community with what they want, but a village hall would do the same. Is the library an appropriate place?

This comment echoed Harris's (1998:3) conclusion that “fundamentally ...public libraries are not associated with social roles, but by and large with traditional functions “. However, this lack of suggestions for improvements from library users or a reluctance to embrace outreach projects does not necessarily mean that library staff in working class communities or working class users are not bothered about what their library provides. Indeed Comedia's (1993:37) research suggests quite the opposite. The value of

the traditional library services should not be dismissed as these are still serving needs. The report concludes that “perhaps the greatest role the library plays in disadvantaged areas may not be through ‘compensatory’ or welfarist activities (important though these are) but in providing a friendly library with a good and varied bookstock”.

Future needs- Computer Provision

While the majority of respondents did not express any additional needs they might have, there were a number of working class individuals, in all cases under the age of 34, who expressed a desire to see computers and Internet provision in the library.

The Internet would be good (Working class female, 25-34, unemployed)

I know they are going to get the Internet in here so that will be good (Working class male, 16-24, employed)

Computers could be useful (Working class female, 16-24, employed)

Computers would help children with homework (Working class female, 16-24, look after the house)

E-mail could get more people in (Working class male, 25-34, employed)

The suggestions by library users that provision of computers would be useful is perhaps not that surprising. The environments in which public libraries operate have changed significantly due to the increasing use of information and communication technologies. In addition, the vast majority of library authorities (95%) already have these resources as a result of the *People’s Network* (Brophy & Eve, 2001). A number of users were aware of other libraries that had computers. Finally, working class individuals are

less likely to have their own computers (Social Trends, 2001) and therefore would be more likely to benefit from public Internet access.

This importance of having computers in the library was recognised by library staff:

We are getting 12 computers with Internet access. We are receiving so many computers to redress the balance

We haven't got our computer and Internet in yet, and we do get asked. That will perhaps entice some teenagers into the library.

We need to have a library service that is in keeping with the latest facilities in other parts of the country. We need to be offering the same service as comparable with other Metropolitan authorities.

These comments reflect the findings of the Northern Ireland General Consumer (1995) who found that, “amongst staff, ICT developments are regarded as the single most important opportunity to improve library services”. This seems particularly relevant in working class communities with their associated poverty: technology is regarded by the government as a key way to in which tackle social exclusion and disadvantage (INSINC, 1997). Providing computers in libraries is a way of “levelling the playing field for those unlikely to be able to afford to buy the new technology themselves” (LIC, 1997).

Eve and Brophy's (2001) research, while not focusing specifically on the working class or working class communities, did regard the introduction of IT in libraries as enhancing the value of the library service: “on the evidence currently available, the provision of end-user IT-based services in

public libraries has positive impacts on the communities and individuals served”.

However, it is also clear that technology should not be regarded as a magic solution to increasing working class public library use. Indeed, it had been questioned as to how far the library is the “natural place” (LIC, 1997) to have computers. Research carried out by Leeds Metropolitan University suggested that libraries may not be the inherently “democratic” institutions they are believed to be and therefore may not reach everyone. (Muddiman et al, 2000). Moreover, there is a feeling that the introduction of IT in libraries may overly benefit the middle classes as they will turn to the free service instead of paying for Internet access at home (Pateman, 2002).

In addition, while technology in libraries may provide a way of encouraging more working class people in, it is recognised that this cannot be regarded as a panacea to social exclusion. As the Net Result (INSINC, 1997) notes, there is only so much technology can achieve, “factors which give rise to social exclusion are mainly economic...[requiring] social policy...to continue to confront and to overcome economic disadvantage”.

7.4 Other future needs

While IT was the main focus of future needs, there were also some other suggestions. These mainly focused on amenities such as refreshments. For example, middle class users wanted to see something akin to the coffee shops in bookshops idea that has come from America and is now the norm in most large British bookshops

What I would like is somewhere to have a coffee and read, like in America in the bookshops. I think that is very civilised. (Middle class female, 25-34, employed)

A coffee bar would be nice. They have one in Barnsley. There are not many places here where you can have a cup of coffee. They are all in amusement arcades. (Middle class female, 65+, student).

In contrast, working class library users had different tastes.

Cups of tea would be nice. (Working class male, 25-34, unemployed)

Cheap beer! That would get people in wouldn't it? (Working class male, 55-64, unemployed)

While the above comments are quite amusing, reinforcing as they do class based stereotypes, they do reflect wider opinions about how the library service could be improved: “the public generally want to see services and amenities extended while staff are more inclined to look for increased participation through improvements to what the service is providing at present” (General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland 1995). The recent Audit Commission (2002) report, *Building Better Libraries* indicated that libraries should be thinking along these lines, although admittedly more in line with the suggestions from middle class users rather than working class library users.

7.5 Summary

This study shows that in many ways the expressed library needs of working Class users are very traditional. Borrowing fiction from the library is regarded as very important by the majority of working class users. It is important for entertainment and escapism purposes. In addition, the free nature of the service was also clearly highly valued.

While there was less uniformity in the response, non-fiction was similarly regarded as important. However, there was a significant minority at Southey and Parson Cross who do not regard non-fiction as important at all. It is suggested that the reason for the low importance attached to non-fiction may be because of the quality of the selection on offer, compared with that at Stocksbridge.

Interestingly, the majority of users did not regard being able to borrow videos as important, contradicting some staff perceptions about the relative importance of this service to users. For younger users this was a very important service though. Thus, libraries can be seen to have a particularly important role in deprived areas, fulfilling needs that are no longer being met by commercial providers.

The importance of non-borrowing services differs markedly. Staff advice and help was generally regarded as important, while access to reference works was notably unpopular. Again, the importance of the service could be attributed to what is on offer. However, the fact that these trends were broadly mirrored in all three libraries could indicate which non-borrowing services should be concentrated on where the library user population is predominantly working class.

The importance of local people having input into the future of their public libraries has been well recognised, especially in relation to minority user groups (Muddiman et al, 2000). However, gaining this type of information proved more difficult. Unsurprisingly, the majority of users could not think of any other services the library could provide that they might need. Where there were suggestions, these were quite predictable, with the focus largely on the need for IT provision.

In some ways, it seems patronising to suggest that working class people don't know what their own needs are. However, it is clear that there is potential for the public library to deliver additional library services that may meet as yet unexpressed user needs. What seems important in the first instance, though, is providing a library service that fulfils the needs of users. How far this is being done will be examined in Chapter 8.

8.0 How far public libraries are serving working class public library needs.

8.1 Introduction

The fourth objective of the study was to assess *how far libraries were serving their working class users and communities*. According to Muddiman et al. the relatively low number of working class library users means that working class library user needs are not being met. This can be seen to be attributed to the fact that “specific provision for the working class, has all but disappeared” (Muddiman et al, 2000:17) Thus, exploring how far working class user needs are being met by current services is of key importance because it will indicate whether this lack of targeted service is particularly detrimental to working class use. In addition, questioning working class people may give an indication of how libraries can better serve their needs in the future.

In order to assess how far library needs were being served, library users were asked a number of closed and open, general and specific questions in relation to approachability and helpfulness of staff, opening hours and borrowing services and non-borrowing services. Library staff’s opinions on this subject were gained by asking a general question about how far they thought the library was serving user needs.

8. 2 Overview

In an attempt to gauge how far user needs were being satisfied with current services, library users were asked how they thought current services could be improved. Library users in all libraries generally seemed to be satisfied with the services and, when asked how current services could be improved, the majority either could not think of ways:

No... It's nice as it is (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

It's alright as it is (Working class male, 25-34, unemployed)

I don't think it could be improved (Working class female, 65+, retired)

No... I have everything I need here (Working class male, 65+, retired)

For what I need it is quite adequate. There's information, staff and if you want help staff will put you in touch with the right people (Working class male, 65+, retired)

No... it's really good (Working class female, 16-24, look after the house)

While some could not think of any further improvements, a number of library users at Parson Cross and Southey commented that they thought the service had improved recently.

It's a lot better than it used to be. It's very nice (Working class female, 65+, retired)

It seems to have got better in the past six months...we have had more books (Working class female, 65+, retired)

They have got some new books in now, it was pretty bad before (Working class male, 55-64, retired)

These kinds of comments, affirming the present library provision, reflect Aslib's (1995:154) findings that "customers are generally positive about library services in the recent past and in the future" and Insight's (1999:3)

findings that libraries are “one of the least criticised local government services”.

In addition, they reflect other research into user satisfaction. Morris and Barron’s (1998) examination of user consultation in public libraries found that a common problem faced by many library authorities was that users were “inclined to favour the status quo” and “had high levels of satisfaction due to low expectations”.

It is suggested that user satisfaction could be found to be higher in deprived areas where the library is the only positive, free service available to the community. Greenhalgh et al (1995: 96) focusing on one estate in Middlesborough, found that while most public agencies addressed the negative aspects of community, “the library was the only building not marked out as a symbol of welfare, compensation and deprivation”. Thus, while the library may have faults, these are far outweighed by the fact that it is there at all.

While users generally seemed satisfied with the present services, staff had more concrete ideas about how the library could be better serving the needs of working class communities:

We could provide more information about jobs and money. We need to supplement information on careers with videos, rather than supplying entertainment videos

As it’s a deprived area it is important that we promote our job finding and benefits information.

These ideas reflect Devereux’s (1972: 172) idea of what the model of a working class library might look like. “A library in a working class area will

emphasise information, and provide many books at a basic and practical level”.

However, Nauratil (1985:29) questions overly focusing on supplying on such material, suggesting that it marks the library out as a conservative rather than progressive institution: “concentrating on this type of information service ...not only betrays our adherence to the view that the poor are responsible for their own poverty- material and informational- but contributors to their own oppression”. It seems rather unreasonable to equate providing jobs information with oppressing working class people. However, it goes without saying that libraries in working class areas should provide this type of information *in addition to* rather than *instead of* the normal borrowing and non-borrowing services.

8.3 Information needs.

How far the libraries are currently meeting the information needs of their communities will now be examined. One way of working out how working class information needs could be better served by the library is to examine what other information sources are serving the need of the working class.

Information sources	Southey Library users	Southey Non-Library Users	Stocksbridge Library Users	Stocksbridge Non-library Users
Other Libraries	13 (48.1%)	2 (10%)	4 (21%)	0 (0%)
Family/Friends	19 (70.4%)	17 (85%)	13 (68.4%)	10 (62.5%)
CAB/Advice shop	13 (48.1%)	8 (40%)	12 (63.2%)	7 (43.8%)
Post Office	13 (48.1%)	6 (30%)	5 (26.3%)	5 (31.3%)
City Council	8 (29.6%)	6 (30%)	6 (31.6%)	3 (18.8%)
Community Centre	6 (22.2%)	1 (5%)	4 (21.1%)	2 (12.5%)
Government Departments	7 (25.92%)	5 (25%)	5 (26.3%)	3 (18.8%)
Professional/Trade Associations	3 (11.1%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.3%)
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 8.1 Information Sources used by Working Class library User and Non-Library Users

Table 8.1 shows that both library users and non-users draw on a range of information sources in addition to or instead of the library. The most common was friends and family with over 60 % of all respondents citing this as an information source. Other popular sources of information, in descending order were Citizens Advice Bureaux, with over 40 % of respondents using these, rising to over 60% for Stocksbridge library users, the Post Office, Government Departments and the City Council. The relative popularity of these information sources for working class people

compares exactly with Marcella and Baxter's (2000) findings as part of wider research into social class and citizenship information needs.

The results show that working class people are not averse to using outside agencies to find out information when they need to. Thus, where the library may not be meeting working class individuals' needs, especially those of non-users, the key task may be to promote the information side of the library in the community. It is not suggested that the library should take on the roles of other information providers. Indeed, the public library has already been accused of becoming "all things to everybody" (Comedia, 1993). However, it is clear that libraries do provide much basic local government, council and consumer information.

Promoting the information role of the library could then be an important way of getting a broader range of working class people to use the library. National surveys indicate information is the second most associated activity with libraries after reading (General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland 1995). As these figures were not broken down by class, it is not possible to tell how far working class people made this association. However, it is clear from earlier findings in this study that non-library users overwhelmingly associated the library with reading and working class library users are significantly less likely to use the library for information purposes (Insight: 1999).

8.4 Staff

Pateman (1999) concludes that one of the key reasons why the public library is not adequately serving the working class is because of the staff they employ. Library staff are by definition middle class and thus, according to Pateman, share the same values as what Van Riel (1999) calls the 'dominant borrower'- the middle class - a fact he regards as hindering social

inclusion initiatives and community librarianship. In order to gauge how far staff were serving the needs of users, library users at all three libraries were asked to rate how approachable and how helpful they thought the library staff were.

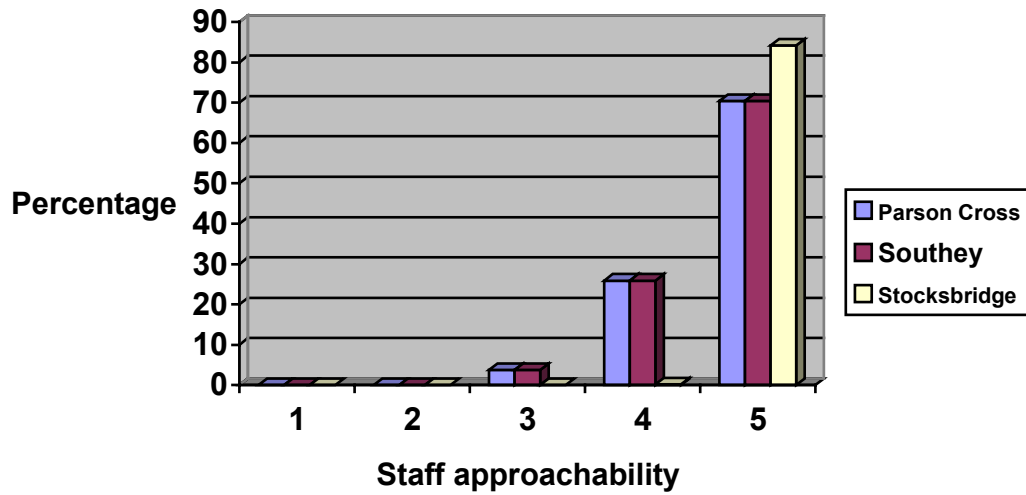


Figure 8.1 Working Class Perceptions of Approachability of Library Staff

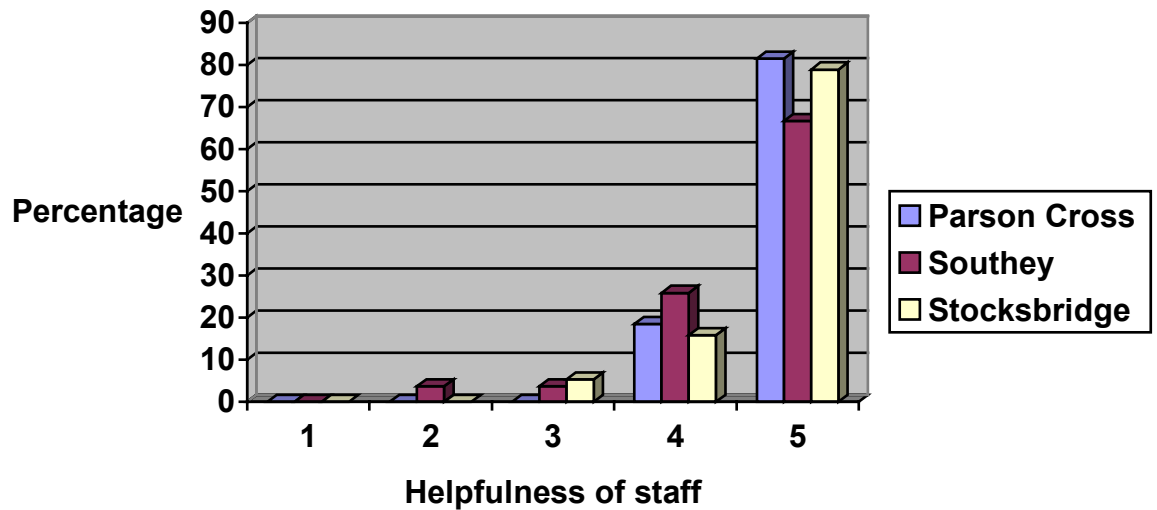


Figure 8.2 Working Class Perceptions of Helpfulness of Library Staff

Figures 8.1 and 8.2 clearly indicate that working class library users in these areas are overwhelmingly positive about their library's staff. Nearly 94% of users at Southey and Parson Cross and 100% of users at Stocksbridge said that they thought the library staff were approachable or very approachable. Results for helpfulness of staff were similarly high. 100% of users at Parson Cross thought that staff were helpful and nearly 93% and 95% for Southey and Stocksbridge respectively.

Numerous additional comments also given by users about the approachability and helpfulness of staff were equally positive:

They're lovely (Working class male, 65+, retired)

Brilliant! Always welcoming, say hello. They go out of their way to look for things (Working class female, 65+, retired)

Wonderful! If I have any questions they are there (Working class female, 65+, retired)

Smashing! They always oblige me, getting me what I want (Working class female, 65+, retired)

Lovely staff (Working class female, 54-65, retired)

They are very friendly (Working class male, 25-34, unemployed)

Staff were also very positive about their colleagues and their role in making the library a welcoming place in the community.

From the staff point of view we also do very well. The library is perceived as “another corner shop”. It’s a very friendly and personal service. It’s a very friendly atmosphere.

I think the thing about this library is that it’s got such a friendly atmosphere, that you know, people don’t walk in and it’s doom and gloom and sshhh and that. It’s always a very vibrant sort of atmosphere.

Staff also noted that they made a special effort with new users in more deprived areas so that they would come to use the library on a regular basis.

We try to sort of make them feel that it’s something they can come back to. We really do try, give them a little leaflet with the opening hours, have a little chat, tell them if they are young mums about the baby time. If they ask us for help we help them with books and things. I think they do try very hard but it’s just getting them in.

We always help. We always look things up on the system. If we haven’t got it we try and find it. We help the children, we will help anyone try and find things. We will look up on Dynix anything they ask. We are very helpful. I don’t think we could do any more. I think we do a good job of it.

In terms of library staff, then, the evidence seems to suggest that these libraries are serving the needs of their users. The results here seem quite contrary to Pateman’s (2000) forceful assertion that “public library staff are part of the problem and not the solution” to low working class use. Working class users, almost universally perceive staff as friendly, helpful and approachable. These sentiments have been echoed in other studies. Linley & Usherwood (1998) investigated some similarly deprived areas in their

social audit of three library authorities and found that library users felt that staff contributed to a warm and pleasant environment.

Of course, these findings do not invalidate research such as that cited by Muddiman (1999) which has indicated that some users (though it should be noted they are not explicitly described as working class) have had negative experiences using libraries. Moreover, comments from some non-users about library staff gained in both Southey and Stocksbridge indicate that there are still issues relating to people's perceptions of library staff. However, overall, it seems that, in all three libraries, staff are more of an incitement than a deterrent to public library use.

8.5 Opening hours

How far present library opening hours are serving the needs of the working class users is debatable.

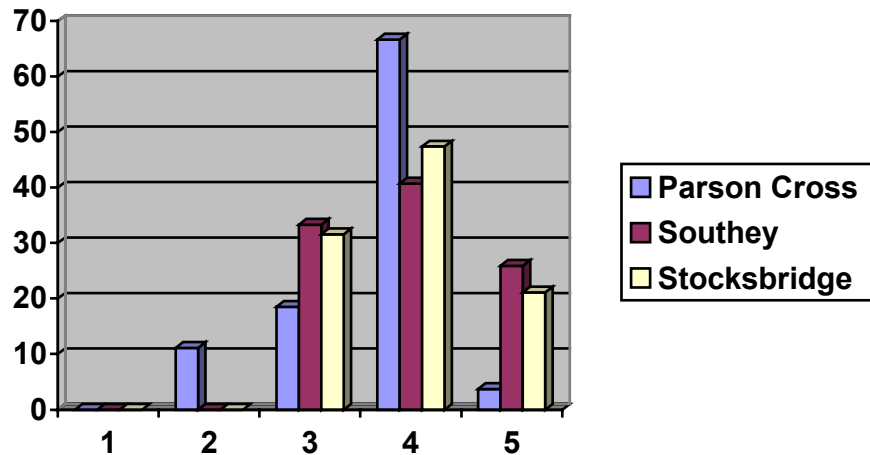


Figure 8.3 Working Class Perceptions of the Convenience of Library Opening Hours

Figure 8.3 shows that the majority of users, over 65% percent, thought that their libraries' opening hours were convenient. Surprisingly, Parson Cross, one of the libraries with only 22 opening hours per week, scored highest with 73.4% of users agreeing that the opening hours were convenient.

However, there is evidence to suggest that the libraries are not serving needs sufficiently in this area. A number of non-users at Southey put their non-use down to the poor opening hours

It stopped opening later at night (Working class female, 45-54, employed)

I can't be bothered. It's never open when I need it (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

In addition, while most of the users seemed neutral or positive about the opening hours, some of their additional comments seemed to suggest that they had become resigned to the fact that it had poor opening hours and could actually do with it being open more often. This was notably the case in Parson Cross and Southey which had very restrictive opening hours.

I have got used to it being closed on Tuesday and Thursday. Occasionally it would be useful to pop in then (Working class female, 45-54, unemployed)

I have got used to the opening times (Working class female, 55-64, retired)

Sometimes I come on days when they have closed and I have forgotten they are shut (Working class female, 16-24, look after the house)

Sometimes I wish they were open more often (Working class male, 35-44, look after the house).

A question about the importance of long opening hours revealed that there is quite a marked difference between the value of long opening hours in the two different communities. A minority of users at Southey and Parson Cross thought that this was important. Interestingly, though, it was at Stocksbridge, which already has the latest opening, that over 63% of users said that they thought longer opening hours were important or very important.

Libraries for all (DCMS, 1999) states that “opening hours should be tailored to reflect the needs and interests of the community” in order to ensure that all groups can use the library. How far the needs and interests of the communities in Southey and Parson would be met by late opening is questionable. Staff comments at Southey and Parson Cross suggested why this would not be such a priority for their users.

They have suggested opening later at night, but our experience is gangs of youths hanging around outside. It stops people coming in rather than encouraging them. Our quietest hour is 5-6 on a Monday pm.

It's the fashion to say if we were open later in the evening then people would come in, but I don't think people would. It's not very safe at night. Our main users are the elderly and children and they don't come out at night,

Thus, the unsafe nature of the estates such as Southey and Parson Cross seemed to make the idea of opening later in the evening and attracting more users unlikely. These comments concur with Aslib's (1995:179) conclusions that “for the elderly and the young, longer opening hours on dark winter evenings are not helpful”. Moreover, the Aslib (1995:179) findings noted that, “an expression for longer opening hours was in fact an expression for more convenient opening hours”. Thus, what is likely to be

more helpful, especially for those living in deprived working class communities, is longer Saturday opening and Sunday opening.

8.6 Stock and services

There seemed to be mixed opinions about how far library stock in working class areas was meeting the needs of working class library users. Some seemed to think that the stock selection had improved:

They did have a low turnover of stock especially talking books, but I think they have sorted it out now (Working class female, 65+, retired)

It seems to have got better in the past six months...we have had more books (Working class female, 65+, retired)

However, the stock selection did not seem to be meeting the needs of all the library users. This generally seemed to be in relation to amount and age of stock rather than the absence of particular genres.

They could do with a better selection. You find out that you take books that you have read already (Working class female, 65+, retired)

The books are not up to date (Working Class female, 65+, retired).

There are some very old books in here. (Working class female, 65+, retired).

Staff perceptions of how well the library services were serving the needs of the users in terms of stock were similarly negative about the age of the stock. This was especially the case at Southey and Parson Cross.

Lack of stock selection can be a problem. Sometimes people come in and have a look around and go without borrowing anything...that bothers me. We have had a couple of lean stock years.

We need a better quality of stock all round especially non-fiction, when books are 25-30 years old It's not good enough.

It could be much better. We could do with a better selection of books and videos.

In addition, a number of library assistants expressed concern that the types of books the library stocked were not always suitable for the communities their libraries were serving. Notably, these comments were all expressed by library assistants who, because they spend much of their time on the counter, are likely to have a better understanding of what library users are borrowing and therefore their needs.

Whoever is buying the books they are not suitable for the needs of this area, You get gardening books and "Changing Rooms" type books coming in which aren't suitable.

We need the right kinds of books. We on the counter know what they like. I know you should encourage people to be more adventurous, but they like them so we should have those kinds of books. What I would like to see is each library getting its own pot of money for books

It would be better if the people who bought them knew what people liked. Joanna Trollope would be better at Broomhill and John Grisham would be better here.

These comments about the unsuitability of the stock reflects a point noted by Pateman (1996): "services and stock are influenced by middle class attitudes and values. This can present a major barrier to public library use by working class people". However, while it is true that those purchasing the books would be middle class, the evidence does not seem suggest that the genres of books are preventing library users from using the library. Any negative comments from the library users referred to the age of the books, or the lack of choice in some areas.

However, the above comments do seem to lend weight to Jordan's (1972) suggestion that libraries in working class areas may need specific types of books. This assertion is quite vague though and notably he does not indicate what types of books these would be. In addition, the staff comments are a reminder of the importance of user need and that, like all libraries, "a library in a working class area...must be reader centred, and must reflect in as many ways as possible the abilities, interests and aspirations of the community " (Devereux, 1972:172).

8.7 Cost

There was an awareness amongst staff that current means of provision may be detrimental to working class in terms of cost.

Where we used to saturate the system with a multitude of copies of popular books we now only buy one or two so it means reserving books. In this area 50p to reserve a book can mean quite a lot of money to people.

A library user at Southey echoed this concern.

I would like it if they had more books on certain authors instead of having to order...because they do charge (Working class female, 55-64, unemployed)

While the issue of cost was not raised by many library users, these kinds of charging policies can be seen to have a disproportionate impact on working class users, and thus could be seen as contributing to, rather than tackling social exclusion. As Usherwood (1989) warns “Libraries can reinforce deprivation by discriminating against the deprived in the provision of services”. Thus, while on the face of it the book stock may be meeting the needs of users, charging policies effectively mean that those who cannot afford it have access to fewer books than those who can.

8.8 Serving future needs

It is clear from *Libraries for all* that libraries should be doing all that they can to encourage socially excluded groups into the library. This has been a fundamental principle for years. As Johnston (1956) said:

“it is the business of the public library to keep the door open and see that no stumbling block lies in the way of those who enter. Anything that contributes to this end is good library practice; anything that blocks it is bad, no matter what the rules might say”

This sentiment is, of course, totally laudable. Moreover, the focus on the public libraries’ various social inclusion initiatives, together with related government policies such as lifelong learning and ICT should mean that there are increased numbers of non-traditional users coming through the doors. However, there are, of course, issues related to serving these extra needs. Staff were aware of the potential conflict they had between encouraging more people in and being able to offer the same level of service.

Libraries should advertise more to get people in, but having said that we are only just coping with the staff we have. It's alright encouraging more but how do you cope?

If government is serious about increasing the numbers of socially excluded using public libraries, then the financial investment needs to be there in order to ensure that the staff, stock and services are there. Working class individuals are the largest socially excluded group under represented in library use. Crude maths suggests that if working class library use were to be proportional to, or indeed exceed, middle class library use, there would be a massive rise in the numbers of people using the library. Thus, while it is one thing to recognise working class library needs and respond to low working class library use, satisfying these needs will put new pressures on the public library service.

8.9 Summary

This part of the study indicates that in many ways libraries are serving the expressed needs of working class library users in both working class and mixed communities. However, how far the evidence presents an objective view of reality is debatable. It is noted elsewhere that libraries serving educationally disadvantaged communities, which Southey and Parson Cross undoubtedly are, are likely to get “artificially high” satisfaction ratings (Proctor & Bartle, 2002).

The evidence suggests that one of the major strengths of the libraries, from the perspective of both library users and staff, is the helpfulness and approachability of the staff. This evidence contradicts commentators such as Pateman (1999) who regard middle class library staff as a major impediment to working class library use. However, his point can still be seen to be valid in relation to the perceptions of non-users.

Current library user needs seem to be being served by the current opening hours. However, in many ways this is not surprising as the majority of users have got used to the rather idiosyncratic opening times. More of an issue seems to be encouraging new working class library users to use the library with inflexible hours and with little room for manoeuvre in extending opening hours in the evening because of the unsafe nature of the areas.

There were fewer positive comments about how far the library stock was serving users' needs, especially in Southey and Parson Cross. There seemed to be a slight dichotomy in opinion between staff and users. While the latter focused on the physical state of stock and lack of selection, the former seemed equally concerned with the fact that the types of books may not be meeting the needs of the area. The fact that access to the full range of the book stock was potentially restricted because of costs was also noted by staff and users.

The evidence suggests that there is perhaps more scope for the libraries to play a greater role in information provision or to promote this area more fully. It was clear that working class individuals use a range of agencies to find information, but evidence in chapter 4 suggests that few were using the library for information purposes. This suggests that the library was not meeting their information needs or that they were not aware of the information role of the library.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken in order to investigate a hitherto neglected area in LIS research, working class library user needs. It seemed important to investigate this subject for two reasons. First, the social inclusion agenda of the present government with its focus on libraries as “the essence of social inclusion” (Library and Information Commission: 1999) has inadvertently re-focused attention on working class library users. Although it is not (often) explicitly stated, there are some similarities between the government’s definition of the socially excluded and the characteristics of working class individuals. Thus, considering the relatively low library use by this social group, it seems that an understanding of this group’s needs is more than due for investigation.

Second, and related to the first point, a number of more radical LIS commentators have suggested that working class user needs are *not* being met because libraries are institutionally classist. This accusation suggests that there are various barriers, either actual or perceived, which are preventing working class users from making use of the library. In order to ensure that libraries are or can be the socially inclusive institutions the government wants them to be, it seems important to assess how far these types of claims are true, by examining what working class needs are and whether they are being met.

The intended outcome of this study was to give a greater insight into working class library needs as well exploring the issues of working class library use and barriers to library use. It is hoped that the information gained will be useful to practitioners and policy makers concerned with improving working class library use.

A number of observations about working class public library use and needs can be made from the findings in this study.

9.2 Working class library use and needs

There have been many studies that have investigated public library use by class. This study provides some valuable supporting evidence to this previous research. In addition, previous studies have always examined usage from a national viewpoint, giving the impression that working class library users are always in the minority. This case study approach was illuminating because, unsurprisingly, “libraries in general reflect and respond to the social demographics of the district they are located in” (Greenhalgh, 1995: 41) Thus, the study provided an interesting insight into how working class users in working class communities are using libraries.

The findings about working class library use were not that surprising, mirroring, as they did, similar results from a whole range of surveys. The majority of working class users used the library for borrowing books. Fiction was noticeably more popular than non-fiction. In addition, working class non-borrowing use was noticeably less than middle class non-borrowing use with an overall average of 23.1 % of users using the library solely for non-borrowing purposes.

The research suggests that, while some of the library use differences may be more appropriately attributed to other variables such as age, there do seem to be some deeply entrenched patterns of library use amongst working class library users. Interestingly, these patterns of use remained even in small branch libraries in working class areas where it may be presumed that working class users would feel more comfortable using the library more fully.

There were some noticeable differences in library use between the two communities. Working class users in Stocksbridge were far more likely to be “infrequent” users, with over 40% of users using the library once a month or less. Book borrowing activities as the purpose of the day’s visit were also significantly lower in Stocksbridge, only 63.2% compared with an average of over 83% users at Parson Cross and Southey.

The research into differences in use in the different areas is inconclusive. It would seem that, while class does seem to be a significant variable in library use, the geographical community the library serves and the size of the library are also significant factors in determining how the library is used.

9.3 Barriers to working class use of libraries

Questioning non-library users at Parson Cross and Southey revealed a range of barriers to working class library use. A number of respondents indicated that there were institutional barriers to library use. Staff too, at Parson Cross and Southey, noted that non-library users in their community were more likely to regard the library as an alien environment. However, the most common reason for non-library use amongst the working class was that they didn’t read.

The research indicates that amongst some working class individuals there remain negative perceptions that the library is not for them, either because of the institutional culture of libraries or its strong association with reading. These comments give some credence to the accusation that libraries suffer from “institutional classism”.

However, the evidence also clearly indicates that a number of non library users cited a number of other reasons that could not be

regarded as class specific. Thus, while it may be tempting, and indeed easier, to attribute working class non-use to the institutional culture of public libraries, there are clearly a number of factors that result in working class non-library use.

With regard to the question of non-use, there did seem to be some differences depending on whether the library was located in a working class area as opposed to a more socially diverse area. In Stocksbridge, the working class non-users were more likely to use the library, although they were not members. In contrast, none of the non-library users used Southey library for any other purposes.

The evidence suggests that the library's place in a community can have an impact on how it is perceived by those who wouldn't ordinarily use it. In Stocksbridge, where the library was clearly very much a focal point of the community, accommodating a range of groups and hosting a number of events, a number of working class non-library users were comfortable using the library either to attend an event or for non-borrowing purposes. This suggests that having a central role for the library within the community can attract new users.

9.4 Working class library user needs.

In many ways, working class library needs can be seen to be quite traditional. When asked to rank the importance of a range of library services, fiction borrowing came up as the most important, with over 60% of working class users in all libraries regarding this as important. Video borrowing was particularly important for younger library users. Non-borrowing use of the library was notably far less important. However, it was clear that access to computers and Internet use was important especially among younger working class individuals.

The evidence suggests that in some ways, working class library users do have some specific library needs; in particular valuing the recreational use of the library. It seems logical then to focus on providing these services, especially if the library is serving a predominantly working class community with few other entertainment amenities. However, comments from younger users suggest that there is a need for information technology in libraries in working class areas.

9.5 How far are working class user needs being served?

How well library user needs were being served was considered in relation to staff, opening hours, stock and services. The attitudes and comments of those working class people who use libraries, in response to these questions, suggested that libraries were serving the (expressed) needs of their users. Notably, the majority of respondents were happy with the staff. Any negative comments were made in relation to stock and opening hours.

Staff, especially at Southey and Parson Cross, were less enthusiastic about how far they were serving the needs of their communities. A number of staff described the libraries at Parson Cross and Southey as "poor relations" compared with libraries in more affluent areas of North Group. There seems to be a greater awareness amongst staff in these areas that working class people may have different needs in relation to stock and that the library was not always meeting these. In addition, library staff here thought that more could be made of the information services the library provides.

In many ways, the evidence seems to contradict Pateman and Muddiman's arguments that libraries are not serving working class people. While there were some complaints, the overall response from users was generally positive. However, there is the question of low

user expectations in disadvantaged communities. In addition, it is clear from comments from some non-users that, whatever the reality, the library is perceived as a middle class place.

It is clear then that some changes could be made, especially if the library is to be relevant to those who do not currently use it. As well as general improvements in stock and opening hours, the information role of the library could be expanded and, when the libraries receive their computers, the IT services should be heavily promoted.

The evidence suggests that Stocksbridge library, based in a mixed community, is better serving working class library needs. By virtue of its nature and size, Stocksbridge library seemed to be serving the needs of working class users better in terms of stock and additional non-borrowing resources. However, it is clear that the majority of working class non-library users in this community are just as unlikely to use the library at present as those in Southey.

9.6 Further research

While this study has provided some insight into working class user needs, its small scale has meant that, inevitably, it has touched on a number of potentially interesting and relevant issues. Thus, there are a number of areas that could benefit from further research:

First, while the age and gender of respondents was noted and mentioned when appropriate by and large, working class individuals were treated as a homogenous group. There seems to be scope to further investigate the relationship between class, gender and age in relation to library use.

Second, in order to limit the number of variables in this small-scale study, the case study libraries were deliberately selected in areas of the city with

low ethnic minority populations. Clearly, though, ethnic minorities will form part of the working class and it would be interesting to examine how ethnicity and class interrelate.

Third, as computers had not yet been installed in the case study libraries, IT use by class could not be examined. However, staff thought that computers would encourage working class into the library and, like the government, saw having computers in libraries as a means of “levelling the playing field”. Thus, it would be interesting to revisit the case study libraries, once they have their computers, to examine who is using the technology and to find out if it is attracting any more working class individuals to the library.

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Appendix 1 Library User Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to fill in this questionnaire. The results from this questionnaire will form part of a study into how far libraries are serving the needs of their communities that I am completing as part of my Master's degree at Sheffield University. The responses given will be treated in confidence

Use

1. On average how often do you use/visit this library?

First visit

About once a month

At least once a week

Less than once a month

About once a week

About once every two to three weeks

2. Could you tell me what you used the library for on this visit?

Circle all that apply

Borrow or return books

Use reference material

Borrow or return tapes/

Ask staff for information

Borrow or return videos/DVDs

Space to study

Meet other people

Check notice boards

Read newspapers or magazines

Attend a meeting or event

Other (please state).....

3. Is this a typical visit for you? If *no* please explain

Barriers

Is there anything that prevents you from visiting the library as often as you would like? *If so please explain.*

5. What are your impressions of the following aspects of the library?

1= Not at all

5 = Very

Staff

How approachable

1 2 3 4 5

How helpful

1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

Atmosphere

How welcoming 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

Opening hours

How convenient 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

6. Please list any problems you have had using the library

7. Library Needs

How important are the following services to you?

1= Not at all

5= Very

Borrowing fiction books 1 2 3 4 5

Borrowing non-fiction books 1 2 3 4 5

Reference books 1 2 3 4 5

Newspapers/ magazines 1 2 3 4 5

Video/DVDs 1 2 3 4 5

Tapes/CDs 1 2 3 4 5

Library catalogue	1	2	3	4	5
Study space	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting place	1	2	3	4	5
Notice boards	1	2	3	4	5
Advice/help from staff	1	2	3	4	5
Long opening hours	1	2	3	4	5
Library equipment	1	2	3	4	5

8. If you have ticked 4 or 5 for anything could you tell me why these services are important?

9. If you have ticked 1 or 2 for anything could you tell me why these services are unimportant to you?

10. Can you think of any ways the *current* library services could be improved?

11. Are there any other services the library could provide that would be useful to you?

12. Which of these sources do you use to find out information?

Other libraries

Family/friends

Citizens Advice Bureaux /Advice shop

Post Office

City Council

Community Centre

Government Departments

Professional/ trade associations

Other

None of the above

13. What other sources do you use for Books/magazines/ CDs/DVDs

Family

Friends

Shops

Video/game rental

Other

None of the above

I would be grateful if you could give me some information about yourself.

14. Are you?

Male Female

15. Which age group do you belong to?

16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

16. What is your current employment situation?

Full-time/part time paid employment

Look after the house

Retired

Student

Unemployed

Something else

17. If you are *employed* could you tell me what your job title is?

If you are *unemployed* or retired could tell me what your last job title was?

18. Please could you describe the job that you do?

19. I would like to ask you about your education. Could you tell me what your highest qualification is?

No formal qualifications

G.C.S.E/O level/CSE/NVQ level 2

A level/NVQ level 3

HND

Degree

Higher Degree

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Appendix 2 Non-library user Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to fill in this questionnaire. The results from this questionnaire will form part of a study into how far libraries are serving the needs of their communities that I am completing as part of my Master's degree at Sheffield University. The responses given will be treated in confidence.

1. Have you ever been a member of a public library ?

Yes. Could you tell me why you are not any longer ?

No. Could you tell me why you have never been a member of the library ?

2. What are impressions of the following aspects of public libraries ?

1= Not at all

5 = Very

Staff

How approachable 1 2 3 4 5

How helpful 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

Atmosphere

How welcoming 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

Opening hours

How convenient 1 2 3 4 5

Other comments

3. Are there any services the public library could provide that would be useful to you?

4. Which of the following sources do you use to find information?

5. Which of these sources do you use to find out information?

Other libraries

Family/friends

Citizens Advice Bureaux /Advice shop

Post Office

City Council

Government Departments

Professional/ trade associations

Other

None of the above

5. Do you read books?

Yes

No

If **yes**, which of these sources do you use to obtain them?

Family/friends

Shops

Other.....

None of the above

6. Do you watch videos?

Yes

No

If **yes**, which of these sources do you use to obtain videos.

Family/Friends

Shops

Video rental

Other (please state)

None of the above

I would be grateful if you could give me some information about yourself.

7. Are you:

Male Female

8. Which age group do you belong to?

16-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

9. What is your current employment situation?

Full-time/part time paid employment

Look after the house

Retired

Student

Unemployed

Something else

10. If you are *employed* could you tell me what your job title is?

If you are *unemployed* or retired could tell me what your last job title was?

11. Please could you describe the job that you do?

12. I would like to ask you about your education. Could you tell me what your highest qualification is?

No formal qualifications

G.C.S.E/O level/CSE/NVQ level 2

A level/NVQ level 3

HND

Degree

Higher Degree

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Appendix 3 Interview Questions for Library Staff

Library users

1. Tell me about the community your library serves.

Prompt: Social characteristics of the community, age, class, employment, education, health

2. Tell me how far you think the library users reflect the make up of the community.

Prompt- Why is this?

Are library users becoming more reflective of the community or less?

Use

3. From your experience can you tell me which libraries services do you think are most in demand/least in demand?

Prompt: Why do you think this is?

Barriers to use

4. What do you think prevents library users from using the library more often?

Prompts - Opening hours

Transport

Safety

Lack of stock selection

5. Tell me what do you think prevents non-library users from using the library?

Prompts- Intimidated

Don't read

Specific library needs

5. Tell me what you think are the specific library needs of this community?

Prompt: Videos/CDs v books

Types of books /information

Serving needs

7. How well do you think the library is serving the needs of its users?

Prompt: Why is this?

8. What do you think could be done to encourage non-users in the community to use the library?

Prompt - People's Network/computers

Is this library involved in any outreach work?

9. Differences (for library staff who have also worked in other libraries)