**Excerpt from:**

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**3. Theoretical Framework**

This study used qualitative methods such as observations and interviews supplemented by a quantitative survey and document analysis to determine ways public libraries might address information inequality. It was largely informed by critical and constructivist theories, specifically those by Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, Shiraz Durrani, and Martha Nussbaum. The work of these scholars was applied to this investigation to situate public libraries and their users in the larger context of community development as well as enlighten information needs of community members.

Pierre Bourdieu's exploration into how worldviews and social hierarchies are created through symbolic power and cultural capital is particularly applicable to libraries in the discussion of information inequality. In modern society, individuals compete for cultural capital and symbolic power. In so doing, a social hierarchy is created that encourages some to maintain dominance over others (Hussey, 2010). As a social institution with symbolic power, libraries are institutions of cultural production and as such not only participate in culture but help to construct it (Budd, 2003). In this way, libraries utilise their symbolic power and unknowingly perpetuate the dominant social hierarchy and thus, information inequality (Budd, 2003). Referred to by Bourdieu as the process of cultural socialisation (Swartz, 1997), it is only through intentional reflection, or praxis, that this process may be disrupted. Freire also focused on the importance of praxis in effecting societal change.

Paulo Freire's work on critical pedagogy was incorporated in this study because of its focus on using praxis as a tool to disrupt inequality. Another facet of Freire's work that framed this study was his insistence that education is not neutral but inherently political (Swanson, 2004). This is also the case with librarianship and overlaps with the work of Shiraz Durrani. Durrani's (2008) work was included in this study to encourage the acceptance of library neutrality as a myth which only serves to perpetuate existing inequitable systems of social hierarchy as described by Bourdieu. While the library profession has long touted itself as neutral and bias-free, this cannot be the case because information itself is "laden with values" and bias (Bossaller et al., 2010, p. 35). By acknowledging the myth of neutrality, libraries will be enlightened to their true role in cultural production and be empowered to use praxis to disrupt existing inequitable social hierarchies of information and knowledge. Friere's focus on emancipation, community participation, and critical praxis should be incorporated into regular library practice if information inequality is to be overcome among women and girls. Critical reflection and theory can be used

as guides to lead libraries to the provision of more equitable information access, services, spaces, and resources. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach was used in this research to provide a method for doing just that.

Based on the work of Amartya Sen, Nussbaum's central capabilities approach informed this study through its provision of ten central capabilities for human functioning that delimit essential information from that which is more superfluous. Nussbaum divided essential information into two thresholds: (1) that which makes beings human and (2) that which makes a human's life worth living. Based on Nussbaum's list of ten central capabilities, I created a list of information essential to living a life of dignity, humanity, and autonomy. This list includes:

> 1. Health and healthy living, including information about aging, sex and reproductive health, contraception and abortion, and nutrition;
> 2. Education and intellectual pursuits;
> 3. Emotional and mental well-being;
> 4. Religion and spirituality;
> 5. Family and home life;
> 6. Employment and financial management;
> 7. Law, politics, and civic engagement;
> 8. The natural world including conservation and sustainable living;
> 9. Recreation and leisurely pursuits for enrichment;
> 10. Living an independent, reasonable, and autonomous life, including the freedom to access information to investigate opportunities, make plans, set and achieve goals.

Built upon Nussbaum's work, this list was created to provide libraries with a framework to help in the determination the information needs of the people within their communities.