Disadvantage and cultural engagement – a study in to the lives of young Londoners: Provocations and insight from academic and policy literature

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Key points:

- The concept of 'disadvantage' is complex, contested and arguably politicized. Much of the literature may not explicitly define itself through the lens of disadvantage, instead it might focus on poverty, deprivation, social exclusion, class, specific named difficulties and so on.
- The concept of 'culture' is also complex and contested, especially between the more narrow traditional definition of 'High culture' and the idea of culture as part of everyday life. The latter definition is arguably more powerful in identifying ways to engage disadvantaged young people in arts and culture i.e. there is a need to build on their existing cultural and creative activities to gain their initial interest and so as not to alienate them when exposing them to new or different activities.
- At the same time there is also an argument expressed by some academics and policy makers that rests on an implicit notion that some forms of art and culture do benefit individuals and society. This view suggests that creating 'cultural literacy' will enhance the social mobility of young people facing disadvantage by helping them better articulate themselves, access opportunities and navigate choices as they get older.
- The concept of 'cultural capital' as used by some commentators is challenging given that it is defined and used in different ways. For Bourdieu, and particularly when talking about cultural capital, "capital" is also describing the ways in which social hierarchies are legitimised as much as the way in which status in one sphere of life is transferable to others. In practical terms, an emphasis on starting from a position of "culture as ordinary" and looking at the forms of creative practice young people are already involved in will avoid repeating this "legitimised dominance".
- An important headline finding is therefore recognizing that both disadvantage and culture are contested terms both in the literature and (by extension) in society, which has implications for policy and practice.
- The literature would suggest that future interventions by AND and the sector could be more productive if thought about through the need to build social capital in disadvantaged groups (i.e. building social relationships, networks and skills). This is partly because access to arts, culture and creative activities tends to build upon social capital and where there is an absence of social capital, it is difficult to develop and sustain other forms of capital.
- Similarly, building social capital is considered a powerful way of developing young people and diverting disadvantaged young people from spiralling in to negative activities or becoming even more disadvantaged.
- Key to targeting young people facing disadvantage, building social capital and supporting young people to engage with different forms of art and culture would be to avoid "double jeopardy" situations. These are instances of social breakdown where neither school nor family can provide the necessary social framework for a young person's well-being and therefore leads to a lack of access to cultural activities. This would be the area, for key groups of young people such as looked after young people, care leavers and young people not in employment, education or training, where targeting interventions to build social capital

through cultural activities are most important and potentially most effective, albeit challenging to achieve.

- There are some emerging key principles that could be embedded within policy and practice to help build social capital with disadvantaged young people (and indeed young people in general):
  - High quality arts and cultural activities that build on the interests of young people are a good mechanism through which to build social capital, bringing together young people around shared interests and values;
  - Over time there is scope to potentially broaden and strengthen young people's interests in different forms of art and culture that they may not initially have been exposed to or interested in. However, it is important not to simply or rashly expose young people to forms of art or culture which they may feel are not for them and thus potentially alienate them;
  - These interventions need to have a duration sufficient enough to support young people over a long period of time to have benefit;
  - Linking these interventions in to existing relationships, such as family, school, friends and other activities, will make them more effective and sustainable (e.g. whole family/home life approaches);
  - Early intervention at a younger age can be more impactful, especially at diverting young people away from offending and gang activity;
  - There is potential to use technology and social media to help build social capital and promote access to cultural/creative activities, but requires further investigation at this stage.

- The four groups specifically explored in this paper are: young carers, looked after young people, disabled young people and those at risk of offending or gang activity. In terms of these groups, the following key points emerge:
  - Assumptions about groups are sometimes contested and heterogeneity within groups is often asserted within the literature;
  - The groups tend to share similar issues and challenges in life which can lead to a lack of social capital, isolation and lack of opportunities;
  - They also tend to share similar barriers to accessing cultural activities such as economic, practical, social, awareness/resonance and psychological;
  - Building social capital and involving young people in arts and cultural activities can help improve outcomes with these four groups;
  - This suggests that despite the complexity of the concept of disadvantage and the difference between and heterogeneity within the different groups, similarities exist which can help shape cohesive policy and practice interventions to improve outcomes.

Context for the research

A New Direction (AND) has commissioned Public Perspectives Ltd, a social research organisation, and Middlesex University to conduct research with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to understand how they engage with different forms of culture and art. One of the drivers for this research has been findings from previous research commissioned by AND which identified differences in cultural/creative activity levels and interest between disadvantaged young people and other young people (AND November 2013 and November 2014).

As part of this research a rapid review of literature has been conducted to inform the research design and materials and help shape the reporting, as well as being a document of value in its own right that establishes some concepts for arts and culture based interventions in the youth sector when working with disadvantage.

This review has been produced for A New Direction (AND) by Dr. Ben Little, Senior Lecturer in Cultural and Media Studies, Middlesex University in conjunction with Public Perspectives.

It should be stressed that this is a 'rapid' review of literature and not a full literature review and as such is not exhaustive. Instead, the author has sought key texts and attempted to use them in responding to the wider challenges posed by AND's growing body of work on disadvantaged youth in London. It offers a set of insights and provocations building from the existing research literature.

There is a wealth of literature on disadvantage from a variety of different academic and policy perspectives. These include but are not exclusive to:

- Academic fields of: Youth Studies, Education, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Economics and Political Theory;
- Policy work in the areas of: Education, Social Policy, Welfare and Benefits, Employment, Youth Policy, Cultural policy.

To maintain consistency, this document has focused on the interdisciplinary area of Youth Studies, but draws upon other areas where required. Ultimately, the broad aim of this document, in addition to specifically helping to shape the research, is to add to the discussions, thinking and research which are already taking place around how best to engage young people in culture and the arts.

This paper covers the following key areas:

- Disadvantage - a politically contested term: An outline of different perspectives on disadvantage;
- Reviewing disadvantage and culture: The challenges in conducting a literature review on this subject and the limitations of the available literature;
- Defining and contextualising "culture": Different perspectives about culture and disadvantage;
- Uses of social and cultural capital theory: A review of perspectives about the concepts of social and cultural capital, which may help shape future interventions;
- A summary of research related to each of the four groups of disadvantaged young people being explored in this research;
  - Disabled young people;
  - Looked after young people;
  - Young people at risk of gang activity/offending;
  - Young carers;
- A full bibliography of sources reviewed and referenced.

Disadvantage - a politically contested term

The concept of 'disadvantage' is complex, contested and arguably politicised. Much of the literature may not explicitly define itself through the lens of disadvantage, instead it might focus on poverty, deprivation, social exclusion, class, specific named difficulties and so on. A discursive perspective is important as in the policy arena, and more widely, both disadvantage and culture are politically loaded (and complex) terms. Disadvantage, like similar expressions to describe people whose wellbeing is at risk or have some sort of barrier to full participation in society (terms such as social exclusion, vulnerable, deprived

and so on), needs to be understood as a contested mode of description for a group of people. The high level of politicisation around young people in this field is arguably a development of the last two decades:

> ‘For many years in the UK, there was a tacit agreement in government that the welfare of disadvantaged children should not form part of party political arguments and should only enter parliamentary debate at the level of general policy... in recent years child welfare has become much more contentious, with regular discussions in parliament and the media about an array of issues affecting young people.’ (Hare and Bullock 2006)

This politicisation is important because how disadvantage is described (and the sub-categories that are placed within it) will determine the sorts of action taken and affect outcomes for young participants in any programmes that have been influenced by research such as this. In terms of this rapid literature review, it means a certain level of caution has been taken in reviewing materials outside the academic peer review ecology.

As a specific term, disadvantage is usually used to describe forms of difficulty in social participation that include, but are not restricted to, economic barriers. It can be about expanding the concept of poverty to cover social and cultural factors or it can be a discourse for applying normative social judgements to "disadvantaged" individuals or families. Crudely, when defining disadvantage, progressive organizations will tend to focus on structural inequalities, while conservative organizations will tend to look at individual traits or family structures. Thus a progressive organisation such as the International Labour Organisation defines disadvantage in structural terms as follows:

> ‘Disadvantage refers not just to economic factors, such as income poverty, or lack of experience in and poor understanding of the formal job market, but also social factors such as gender, racial, ethnic or migrant background, and geographical isolation with poor access to quality education and job opportunities.’ (ILO 2011)

Conversely, a more conservative organisation like the Centre for Social Justice will argue that for excluded young people: "the underlying causes of challenging behaviour and disengagement from education are often rooted in the family environment" (Eastman 2011).

Politicisation of the issues continues through the think tank literature on the individual categories of disadvantage. For instance, a paper from the right-wing Institute for Policy Studies claims that state provision of support for disabled children is: “fuelled by ideological theories that have little relevance to everyday life”(Heath and Smith 2004). Likewise with literature on gangs, more progressive think tanks like the Runnymede Trust assert that the London riots were not about gangs, but about wider social problems: “The fact that [the economic crisis and the riots] might well be interlinked, and signify deeper failures elsewhere in our social structure, is not an issue that is being publicly debated.” (Hallsworth and Brotherton 2011). So on the one hand, disadvantage can be seen as a structural feature of society encompassing racism, sexism and broad economic failing, and on the other as a result of social breakdown and in particular the failure of family values

and a shift away from the nuclear family. In essence the position a given organisation takes on it says much about their world view and will influence significantly the practical and policy responses adopted by that organisation.

Reviewing disadvantage and culture

Substantial amounts of literature around disadvantage can be found across the humanities and social sciences and particularly in applied practice and policy areas, which a rapid review such as this can only focus on in a limited way. A scan of the available literature suggests there remains a key gap in terms of the explicit relationship of disadvantage to culture and the arts (this may also partially be a question of choice of terms).

There are also philosophical questions around the purpose of the arts and culture in relation to disadvantage. Why is it valuable? What purpose does it serve disadvantaged people themselves to encourage access to the arts or other forms of creative engagement? There are responses in popular literature that may serve to provide answers to these questions (art's value lies in a subjective experience for instance (Carey 2006)), but they are not specific to disadvantaged youth. The recently launched Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value stresses that production and consumption of culture and creativity should be enjoyed by the whole population and deliver the entitlement of all to a rich cultural and expressive life, with the end that this benefits both the individual and society (Warwick Commission 2015). Conversely the general trend in policy is to use treasury generated cost-benefit analysis of the value of investment in artistic activities (HM Treasury 2003). This is relevant in the current funding climate as, despite a huge increase in funding in exchange for imposing managerial protocols like cost-benefit analysis during the New Labour era, participation in the arts did not significantly increase or substantially widen (Edgar 2014). Justifying the funding of widening participation in the arts is increasingly difficult in these terms. Now as funding looks to drop to around 50% of its Blair era peak, many of the management mechanisms remain in place or are intensifying, while there are few new sources of income.

For our purposes here, work with disadvantaged young people in the area of the arts and culture will almost certainly be constrained by this double bind: a strict regime of accountability with a rapidly decreasing funding pool with sharpened competiveness for sums available. Therefore, this paper has approached much of the literature from a perspective that seeks ways to address the challenges this poses by using a conceptual frame that provides a language to respond to those demands for accountability. Consequently, the review has drawn largely upon materials from the youth studies field that look at ways in which the arts or cultural activities can be used to develop the social capital (i.e. the social relationships, networks and skills), alongside increasing access and interest in new and different forms of art and culture for disadvantaged young people.

Defining and contextualising “culture”: Different perspectives about culture and disadvantage

For at least the last 70 years defining what constitutes culture has been a contentious debate in our society. On the one hand, we have the traditionalist position that culture should be understood as "the best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 1869) leading to the “great tradition” (Leavis 1948) which produces new and deeper understandings of our common humanity, but which could also be understood as a process which determines privileged forms of taste. On the other hand, there is the classic

cultural studies position that "culture is ordinary" and constitutes "a whole way of life" (Williams 1989).

This second definition is important as there may be named cultural (and sub-cultural) forms that young people might identify with, for instance disability arts, street music and street art, which may not be recognised within the traditional view of culture. Likewise an elite view of culture might miss that implicit within someone's disadvantage are various forms of creative and cultural activity (Nayak and Kehily 2014). To understand culture as a whole way of life we would include culture/arts/creative activities that may normally sit outside of a narrow definition of culture such as street fashion, music, graffiti, lingo and slang and so on. Moreover this wider view of culture is automatically inclusive of differences in ethnic culture.[1]

Social class is another dimension of a wider cultural analysis that can also be helpful to describe some aspects of youth disadvantage. However it is important to be careful about simply ascribing the cultural dimensions of working class life as a deliberate rejection of 'bourgeois values' or valorising the culture of more extreme forms of deprivation as a form of resistance as:

> 'Alleged defining underclass features [of 'disaffected' youth] were largely the undesired result of circumstances beyond the control of young people and their circumscribed opportunities rather than manifestations of any rejection of mainstream values'. (McKendrick, Scott, and Sinclair 2007)

Practices that once could be clearly defined as part of working class culture either for working people or by them (Hoggart 1957) are not as homogenous as they once were, yet there are commonalities still and the idea of the working class (or classes) remains a useful tool to think through culture so long as other kinds of non-dominant cultures (sub-cultures, BME, queer etc) are also included in any analysis.

Many of the cultural activities that AND seeks to extend opportunities for are such that they can require acquired knowledge to appreciate them as an audience or extensive practice and honing of skills to be expert at them as an artist/practitioner. Forms of working class youth culture are no different – from being an aficionado of Charva fashion to being a Grime MC – dedication to a creative activity requires passion, investment and a social framework to understand its values and share the production of meaning through its practice.

Some policy assumes that hard to engage young people are disaffected and exclude themselves from public culture and that policy should work towards a change of attitude. Evidence shows this is not the case, instead suggesting that economic barriers quickly become internalised and young people develop psychological barriers marking certain activities as "not for us" (Muschamp et al 2010). To adapt to these internalised barriers, instead of starting projects from where policy makers and project designers want young people to progress to, they could begin with the cultural practices they already engage in:

[1] The Warwick Commission, Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth, 2015 highlights the importance of valuing different forms of art and cultural activity as being beneficial for individuals and society, especially as some groups are not, and may never fully, participating in publically funded arts.

> ‘Young people are not disaffected, and neither is there a distinct sub-group within them who are especially problematic… education, training and social capital opportunities should be provided that positively respond to their preferences and self-identified needs.’ (McKendrick, Scott, and Sinclair 2007)

In short, all this suggests that young people, especially those facing disadvantage and part of different sub-cultures, are not necessarily disengaged with arts and culture. They may just be disengaged with the forms of art and culture which are often publically funded and which they have limited exposure to and interest in and which they may feel ‘are not for them’. There is a risk that simply exposing young people to these forms of art and culture could alienate them further and, consequently, the starting point is to value and strengthen the art and cultural activities that these young people are already engaged with.

Uses of social and cultural capital theory: A review of perspectives about the concepts of social and cultural capital

AND has adopted the term ‘Cultural Capital’ to refer to the idea that by engaging with culture throughout childhood, young people are better able to articulate themselves, access opportunities and navigate choices as they get older:

> ‘Cultural capital, in this sense, becomes a currency, an asset and an enabler of social mobility with the potential to help narrow the gap in terms of positive outcomes between children from poor backgrounds and those from wealthier families.’ (AND 2014)

Linked to this idea is that of ‘cultural literacy’ which advances the notion that certain types of cultural experience and knowledge will help young people from different backgrounds have greater social mobility (Hirsch 1987).

These concepts may have validity, although there is little evidence available, due to a lack of research, to prove the theory. There is also a risk in using these terms which could be subject to misinterpretation and inappropriate use. Implicit within the concept of ‘cultural literacy’ is the notion that some forms of art and cultural activity, possibly publically funded activity, are of greater value than other forms. This brings us back to the debate between ‘high’ culture and culture being all around us and the need to start with valuing and strengthening the existing interests of young people before exposing them to forms of art and culture which they may feel are not for them or they do not resonate with.

The other problem with using the term ‘cultural capital’ is that it is a concept originally attributed to Pierre Bourdieu who employed this to describe how cultural distinction helps confer status and sustain elites. He did not refer to cultural capital in the way it is being used today by some organisations. For Bourdieu, cultural capital cannot be easily acquired. It is generated through a combination of domestic and educational environments (the "habitus"), but it is extremely difficult to produce artificially as it is largely transferred in the home: “the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment [is], namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital.” (Bourdieu 1986). A high level of

cultural capital is not simply an interest in specific creative practices (such as opera or ballet) that could be acquired by individual commitment or exposure to cultural forms that have typically been marked high culture - you could be a working class opera fan and still be working class. It is instead a whole set of class markers linked to taste and other forms of cultural distinction that mark some people as higher and others as lower class.

For Bourdieu (1984) institutionalised art also serves as part of this process of deepening exclusion:

> 'Art fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order: to enable educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians within the gates of their own barbarity, all they must and need to do is to manage to conceal themselves and to conceal the social conditions which render possible not only culture as a second nature in which society recognises human excellence or 'good form' as the 'realisation' in a habitus of the aesthetics of the ruling classes, but also the legitimised dominance (or, if you like, the legitimacy) of a particular definition of culture.'

In such a way arts organisations should be very careful of using cultural capital as a concept for justifying intervention in the lives of disadvantaged young people as it could be understood as simply bolstering the privilege of those with mainstream cultural capital. That is, interventions designed to improve the cultural capital of disadvantaged young people may not be the best way to improve outcomes as the system is invariably rigged against them *through that specific capital frame*. For contemporary commentators, the metaphor of capital is attractive as it suggests exchangeability between spheres - economic to social and so forth - thus suggesting trying to build one sort of capital will almost magically help with others. However for Bourdieu, and particularly when talking about cultural capital, "capital" is also describing the ways in which social hierarchies are legitimised as much as the way in which status in one sphere of life is transferable to others. In practical terms, an emphasis on starting from a position of "culture as ordinary" and looking at the forms of creative practice young people are already involved in will avoid repeating this "legitimised dominance" (Bourdieu 1986).

Instead of cultural capital, a look at social capital might be more advantageous - this is the strength of an individual's social networks. Using social capital as an idea to describe disadvantage recurs throughout the literature appearing in core sources beyond Bourdieu, such as Robert Putnam and James Coleman (Coleman 1988, Putnam 2001, Tzanakis 2013). Importantly it is a lack of social rather than cultural capital that seems to be a key way to understand social exclusion (Deuchar 2009). There is some need for caution here as Bourdieu saw social capital, much like cultural capital, as a way of describing another facet of class domination. But unlike cultural capital, the networks, bonds and reciprocal social obligations that make up a wealth of social capital are potentially more accessible to those starting out from a less advantaged position (it is also a term which is far more developed and has wider use in policy and practice).

It is perhaps then through the frame of social capital theory (SCT) that the strongest justification for publicly funded creative activities can be found in terms of support for the most disadvantaged young people. While SCT has had its trenchant critics and many of

their objections are valid, it is its close match to discourses of contemporary politics that render it useful:

> 'It has been at the core of Third Way politics, embraced by many western governments in the face of what some see as the crisis of the welfare state and the more recent failures of the free market economy to deal with issues of social and economic disadvantage and exclusion. In this context the concept bridges the political gap between market and state, or liberal free market policies and welfare statism, and brings the social into the economic sphere.' (Holland 2009)

When describing the aims of any programmatic intervention to combat social exclusion as being to generate social capital, there can be confidence that the theory behind the argument is broad and robust (if still contested). This may mean that the artistic or cultural dimension is primarily a way to bring young people together and engage in creative activity to strengthen their social networks. This would probably entail a (not necessarily exclusive) focus on cultural forms that young people are already involved in or familiar with.

A key paper here is Cherylynn Bassani's 2007 'Five Dimensions of Social Capital Theory as they Pertain to Youth Studies' as it is referenced many times and is used across a range of youth studies papers as means to use SCT to understand disadvantage. "Social capital is created in a complex process" she argues and moreover "that social capital not only directly effects well-being, but also indirectly influences well-being due to its mobilizing role [for other forms of capital]" (Bassani 2007).

Bassani argues that social capital is the pivot around which other forms of capital revolve when thinking about wellbeing. She suggests that across a wide range of literature that there is a linear relationship between social capital and well-being.[2] In trying to piece together what Holland (2009) calls an integrative theory of SCT, Bassani offers a framework to draw together different strands of thought from across a number of disciplines to create an effective tool for looking at young people. For instance: "It is easiest to think of social capital as having two fundamentally interconnected components: the structural (who is in the group) and the functional (how the people in the group interact)". For children and young people the usual sources of strong social capital revolve around structures with close-adult child interaction, but normally one that is shared as an experience with other children. For Bassani poor social capital is usually linked to "resource depletion" when too little adult time is available to children or other issues in institutional locations for social capital (school and family) mean that children cannot get high quality access to supportive adults.

Bassani argues that where social capital at home and in school is high (supportive domestic arrangements plus high levels of engagement in school) there is a boosting effect. Where one area is low, the young person tends to focus on the other social group in

[2] However this has not been found to be the case in some literature around immigrant groups where closed but strong familial ties do not necessarily equate with increased wellbeing as they can prevent the formation of new "out of group" ties. This could possibly be read alongside 'Strength of Weak Ties' (Granovetter 1973) which distinguishes between bridging connections between groups and bonding connection within groups. Social networks could be a key way of generating weak ties and forming groups that generate some social capital (e.g. Wells 2011 on migrants in London).

what she calls a compensating effect. However, of most importance in terms of disadvantage is where there is low social capital in both locations. This constitutes the "double jeopardy effect" and has been used to explain things like gang membership or other forms of social exclusion. Deuchar (2009), for example, picks up on this to use the diagram below to explain why people become at risk of gangs:

	Primary Group Social Capital (Home)		
		High	Low
Secondary Group Social Capital (School)	High	Boosting Effect	Compensating effect
	Low	Compensating effect	Double Jeopardy effect (gang risk/ other forms of exclusion)

Young people need a form of social belonging and where school and family fail to provide this, gangs step in with the tight-knit close bonds that are not being provided elsewhere and which we all need to develop.

The key opportunity for the cultural sector here is understanding that other forms of community (e.g. art/drama/music club) could provide an alternative source to fill this gap, but they must do so in a conscious way. While the normal corrective in such a situation is often resource intensive - increasing school budgets to reduce class size or prolong the school day for instance - there is also evidence to suggest that in leisure activities, the functional purpose (i.e. creative activities) can be more significant than the structural elements (number of adults to children) if the process is persistent through time. Moreover, it is also generally accepted that starting such interventions at a younger age can help divert young people away from negative behaviour such as offending and gang activity before behaviours become ingrained. There is also some evidence that linking project design to existing relationships, such as (family, school, friends, other activities) will make them more effective and sustainable (e.g. whole family approaches and working with existing peer groups or linking in to existing activities such as youth clubs or sports clubs).

Working from the interests and existing behaviour (including their use of technology and social media) of young people is important again because:

> ‘Value differences among… group members … create functional social deficiencies because the parents, youths, teachers, and/or other adults who have dramatically different values are not likely to spend as much time together, or have as close relationships compared with group members who share the same or more similar values.... [and] ... In youth-centred groups, shared values are likely to be the central joining feature.’ (Bassani 2007)

In conclusion, what this means is that arts and cultural activities can play an important role in generating social capital, which in turn can help reduce disadvantage and prevent young people from spiralling in to further disadvantage. For this approach to be effective, the cultural activities need to build on the interests and existing activity of young people (valuing and strengthening this activity) and be long lasting interventions that help generate a legacy of social relationships and develop the skills and confidence of young people as opposed to short term programmes. It may be that as part of this process,

young people are supported over time to engage with other forms of art and culture which they may have previously had limited exposure to or interest in. By developing their social capital, it is possible that young people may then have the structures and support around them to sustain their interest in new and different forms of art and cultural activities.

The four disadvantaged groups focussed on within this research

The Warwick Commission 2015 highlights low levels of participation in publically funded arts and cultural activities from some groups in Britain:

> 'Despite the excellent work and high levels of commitment to change in the Cultural and Creative Industries, low cultural and social diversity amongst audiences, consumers and the creative workforce remains a key challenge for future success. We are particularly concerned that publicly funded arts, culture and heritage, supported by tax and lottery revenues, are predominantly accessed by an unnecessarily narrow social, economic, ethnic and educated demographic that is not fully representative of the UK's population.' (Warwick Commission 2015)

A challenge for this research is identifying the groups most relevant to target within this research. One problem related to this is that, as mentioned earlier, disadvantage is complex and contested. Some young people face multiple disadvantage and fit within several different definitions or criteria. The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, (NatCen 2011) identified that at least 15% of young people may face 2 or more forms of disadvantage, which tends to have a more significant impact on young people and society. As they state: "Whilst the experience of a single disadvantage can create difficulties for young people, multiple disadvantages can often interact and exacerbate one another, leading to more harmful and costly outcomes for both the young person and society as a whole" (NatCen 2011).

In order to make the research work in practice, it has focussed on four key groups that face life circumstances that could be described as disadvantaged. The rationale for choosing each one is based on incidence, relevance of the group for London, the degree of complexity of their situation and where arts and culture is likely to sit in relation to that.

With the exception of disabled young people, who are instead more likely to be materially less well-off later in life, being part of the groups described below has a strong relationship with low economic status. People in care tend to be originally born into poorer families, young carers are often such because their family lacks the resources to provide for care in other ways and the public debate around "gang culture" is arguably little more than a highly racialized discourse used to describe the activities of young, often black, men from deprived economic backgrounds. This is significant because it means that many of the previous AND research findings which focused on socio-economic deprivation will continue to be relevant. However, it should be noted that assumptions about socio-economic status cannot be automatically assumed in working with these groups.

Another challenge is that assumptions about these groups are sometimes contested and heterogeneity within groups is often asserted within the literature. There is likely to be

much variety within each group in terms of the reasons for disadvantage, the degree of disadvantage experienced and its impact on their life.

Disabled young people

There are 770,000 disabled children under 16 in the UK, representing 5% of the population. Although this is unlikely to be a homogenous group, most young people in this category face poor outcomes in terms of education, employment, finances and housing which tend to translate into poor outcomes as they grow up[3]:

- A disabled 18-year old is less than half as likely to enter higher education as a non-disabled young person of the same age
- 20% are discouraged to take a GCSE qualification because of their impairment
- By the time they are 26, disabled young people are four times as likely to be unemployed as their non-disabled peers; those who do work earn 30% less than their non-disabled peers
- 60% of people with a disability live below the poverty line
- Over 40% of disabled young people aged between 16 and 24 live in accommodation that doesn't meet their needs

Data from the Department for Culture, Media and Sports also suggests that adults with a disability are also less likely to engage with arts and culture than people without a disability, something which is likely to have its roots earlier on in life (DCMS, 2012).

The arts for many disabled young people can often mean induction into a subculture in which disabled people take control of the definition of their conditions and assert an argument around disability that is resistant to dominant discourse. This is often something that happens organically due to the way in which disabled people are differently institutionalised - in terms of use of the welfare state, medical professional and educational needs. Some of these cultures are more firmly established than others - for instance deaf culture is well established with BSL a recognised minority language (britishsign.co.uk 2015).

Over the last few decades a broad disability subculture has received establishment recognition as both a political and a cultural movement:

> 'Disability art has become inextricably linked to a radical new 'disability politics and culture'; its aim is to bring about a more equitable and inclusive future... Disability culture... is therefore a minority, sub, or subordinate culture. It emerged from within, and is associated with, the international disabled people's movement, and reflects the norms and values of disabled activists, their supporters and allies.' (Barnes 2003)

The key principle in this culture is what's called the "social model" where a strong distinction is made between a biological impairment (a lost limb, or defective body mechanism) and the social disability (an inability to function normatively in society). Such a culture is particularly valuable to young people as "within the context of disability culture there is an acceptance of impairment as a symbol of difference rather than shame, and

[3] Liveability.org.uk

recognition of the significance and value of a disabled lifestyle" (Barnes 2003). However the social model is not universally accepted as being a useful approach to disability (Shakespeare and Watson 2001). The social model emphasises that any barriers to disabled people participating in any aspect of society including arts and culture is not due to the disability in itself, but rather due to the failure of society, services, organisations and activities to adapt and support the involvement of disabled people.

The Disability Arts Movement, the artistic movement linked to the subculture, is deeply critical of both the arts establishment and the use of the arts as "treatment" for disabled people. This is because it is: "about the nature of the culture of art and society itself" (Darke 2003); and moreover:

> ‘Traditional responses to the issue of disabled people and the arts have been based on paternalism. Those disabled people viewed as inadequate and incapable have been given art as therapy in the context of special schools, day centres, and segregated institutions.’ (Barnes 2003)

Helping to introduce disabled young people to disability art could be a powerful source of confidence in thinking through and coming to terms with their disability. Organisations such as NDACA might be useful to explore further links (National Disability Arts Collection and Archive 2014).

However some caution is required here as there are more integrated approaches which may not be so explicitly political. While there is not a huge amount of academic material (although there is some - see for instance (Gjærum and Rasmussen 2010)), London-based groups like Chickenshed youth theatre (linked to Middlesex University) could make an exemplary case study of an integrative model. Calling themselves an "inclusive theatre" they go out of their way not to mention disability, rather seeking to emphasise that they are diverse and open to all abilities.

Looked-after young people

There were over 68,110 looked after children in England as of March 2013; over half became looked after because of abuse and neglect and a substantial proportion (45%) also have a mental health condition. Generally children in care continue to have poorer outcomes than the wider population; this is particularly true for educational attainment and employment outcomes later on down the line but also when it comes to homelessness and mental health. Although it is likely that children in care in London are doing better than those in the rest of the UK (London is ahead of the national average in the educational attainment of children in care), it is still a group that tends to face significant challenges.

Information on looked-after children can be largely found within social work literature, they are a group for whom the "double jeopardy" model could be useful for as both school and home can be problematic locations for developing social bonds. Similar issues that affected children in care can also affect adopted children:

> ‘Most adopted children, other than those adopted internationally, will have come through the care system. Their early years are likely to have been unsettled and undermined by neglect, abuse, environmental disadvantage

> and instability, just as much as those of children currently in care.' (Comfort 2007)

Looked-after young people typically experience many classic traits of disadvantage. However, many of the factors involved are also associated with their likely socio-economic location in society: "The socio-economic risk factors that are linked with family breakdown and admission to care also predict low educational achievement, such as social class and poverty." (Berridge 2007). This suggests some care should be taken in connecting problems with a child's 'looked after' status with issues that may simply be tied to poverty.

On the other hand, understanding these young people as a distinct group has some advantages in terms of visibility. Getting needs met as well as challenging the "abnormal" status of their childhood could be helpful as: "Understanding children and young people who are fostered as a minority group who collectively experience distinctive childhoods with some structural disadvantages enables these commonalities to be highlighted" (Goodyer 2013).

One key issue facing looked-after young people is a lack of autonomy and often a failure to express their wants and desires: "The approach of child and family social work has been largely preoccupied with providing children with a safe, protected childhood, with a low priority awarded to the participation of looked-after children and young people in the design, delivery and monitoring of their services" (Goodyer 2013). This could be an area where arts practice could help develop their subjective understanding of the world and thus be better able to assert their needs, as well as develop their skills and importantly social capital within their groups and with other young people in different circumstances.

Good practice could perhaps be found at 'The Centre' in Bristol formerly known as 'Our Place' which uses arts as part of their programme of out of school activities for looked after children. Its expertise around specific issues common to looked-after children could be useful in thinking about arts programmes that target them as a group, for instance:

> 'Many of our children can only participate in a group activity for 15–20 minutes or less, and then need a short time away to calm themselves and refuel... [however] looked after and adopted children are very often afraid to be left on their own.' (Comfort 2007)

Like with disabled young people there is a risk here in thinking about and working with people from this background as a homogenous group as opposed to integrating them into wider groups of young people without singling them out as different. Moreover it is important to note that:

> 'Residential care does not necessarily indicate a state of ill-being... Many children have a positive experience of being in residential care and consider that they benefit greatly from their time there.' (Axford 2008)

Young people at-risk of offending and gang activity

Youth surveys have found that 2-7% of young people aged 10-19 in the UK report being members of a gang[4]. Girls' involvement in gangs is a growing issue - 12,500 girls and young women have been found to be closely involved in gangs (Pearce, J.J. and Pitts, J.M, 2011). This is a category of young people which feels very relevant for London considering 50% of shootings and 22% of serious violence in London is thought to be committed by known gang members.

Gang violence tends to be localised and recurrent in certain areas with family and individual risk factors also tending to repeat themselves and violence and abuse being transmitted from one generation to the next. Risk factors for young people include: early childhood; neglect and abuse; ill health in the family (including mental ill health); parental violence and drug addiction; school exclusion and early conduct disorders; early involvement in local gangs; early and repeat offending, inadequately punished or prevented.

The youth studies literature suggests caution as much of what is labelled as "gang" behaviour "is simply a new label for normal youth group activity, used to justify increasingly repressive criminal justice responses" and that ideas about gangs often used with "little evidential base" (Fraser 2013, Deuchar 2009).

It is accepted that US based research into gangs (where they are a more established and deadly phenomenon) has informed UK policy makers. This American literature tends to produce an unhelpful stereotype of young people's social engagement around place, which is what sociologically gangs and gang membership tends to refer to (Fraser 2013). UK based scholarship has more helpfully understood gangs as sub-cultural forms in themselves with several useful pieces of research conducted in Glasgow over the last 10 years that have helped to dispel some myths.

Social capital theory is frequently deployed to help understand the phenomenon of 'gangs': "Young people who are gang members get a sense of social identity from them which may be lacking in their experiences of family and community" (Deuchar 2009). So gang culture is a way of building social capital – gang membership itself is a cultural activity formed in a vacuum of other modes of social and cultural organisation. What constitutes a gang is also unstable: many activities perceived as "gang-like" are the consequence of normal youth gathering in the context of material desperation or social exclusion. This all then suggests that a way to divert young people away from gang activity is to engage them in alternative activities which are of interest to them (potentially cultural and creative activities) and help build social capital, steering young people away from negative influences.

Part of the issue here is deprived young men adopting forms of masculinity that assert individual agency where there is little agency otherwise available and that work within "street" logics that have modest mainstream value. For instance: "being tough has great subcultural value, it displays the cultural capital of knowledge of certain social strategies; it accrues symbolic capital in terms of prestige, and brings the social capital of subcultural group belonging and solidarity" (Holland 2009).

[4] Ending Gang and Youth Violence: a Cross-Government Report (2011)

However, these macho appearances often obscure a profound commitment to the forms of cultural and creative activity that "gang members" engage in. Young people interviewed by Nayak disavow the violence associated with their subcultures in favour of their art, for instance one of her interviewees rejects the association of Charva gangs with violence: “A proper charv has a Passion for Monkey [rave music] and would rather sit in a house with a set of decks and a mic and MC till they can’t talk [rather] than looking for fights” (Nayak and Kehily 2014).

Young Carers

There are 166,363 (just over 1%) young carers in Britain (Census 2011). This is likely to be a conservative estimate and more recent surveys have suggested the number could be four times greater. According to the Children’s Society (2013):

- 13% of young carers are under the age of 10. On average children provide 3 hours of care a week but 30% care between 5 and 15 hours a week and 8% for more than 15 hours;
- Young carers are more likely to come from disadvantaged households – they are more likely to have mothers with no qualifications, to be from a family with three or more children and where at least one person has a disability. The average annual income of a carer’s family is £5,000 less than a ‘normal’ family; they are also more likely to live in a household where nobody is in work;
- They are more likely to have poor outcomes at school - 1 in 20 young carers miss school because of caring responsibilities and many have significantly lower education attainment at GCSE level. They are more likely to be NEET as a result (1 in 3 young carers are compared to 1 in 4 of their peers) and less likely to be in skilled occupation by the age of 21;
- Caring duties place time pressures on their lives which can mean they are more likely to miss out on a range of opportunities outside school such as spending time with friends and engaging in activities.

The material on young carers again is found mostly in social work and social policy. Saul Becker's work in the 1990s seems to be the key body of work on young carers in the UK and it is from this that much policy is being drawn. The Becker and Becker 2009 report *Young Adult Carers in the UK* provides a good overview of barriers and disadvantage young carers face such as lack of time, lack of money, lack of identity, lack of parental support to explore interests and social exclusion especially from peer groups.

A key tendency is to argue that young carers are hard to identify. The Carers Trust lists the following reasons why young carers might not come forward:

- Their parent’s condition is not obvious so people don’t think that they need any help
- They do not realise that they are a carer or that their life is different to their peers
- They don’t want to be any different from their peers
- They believe that the school will show no interest in their family circumstances
- They want to keep their identity at school separate from their caring role
- It’s not the sort of thing they feel can be discussed with friends
- There has been no opportunity to share their story
- They are worried about bullying
- They worry that the family will be split up and taken into care
- They want to keep it a secret and/or are embarrassed

- They see no reason or positive actions occurring as a result of telling their story (Carers Trust 2013)

Making the situation of young carers visible then becomes a key concern, and there is evidence that many young people find intense relief in realising there are groups of young people who have similar experiences and that support is available to them. However, such relief is counterbalanced by questions of whether the young people themselves would want to identify as a group (Barry 2011). In fact, many might simply want the time to experience a "normal" childhood and adolescence, for example 16-17 year old carers "wanted to go out more but they were constrained in this by the growing expectations from their family that they should take on more caring responsibilities as they got older" (Becker and Becker 2009). So arts and cultural engagement might need to recognise that social engagement would again be key here and the double jeopardy model of social capital might well be applied (i.e. social breakdown at home and school). It might also be important that respite services would be needed in some cases of extreme dependency by the cared-for adult.

Other relevant issues for this group are that:

- Leaving home is complex, involving discussions and negotiations within the family, as well as being confident of alternative caring sources;
- Young carers aged 16 and 17 know very little about local services for adult carers, including services (if any) for carers aged 18+;
- Most young carers are anxious that the support they were receiving from a young carers project would cease when they became 18 (Becker and Becker 2009).

An important thing with this group is that interventions can be highly effective. Recognition of their status and support offered either through additional help or relief from care duties can have a substantial impact on outcomes (Carers Trust 2013).

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