

# The public library under late Capitalism: Feminist Bureaucracy, Economics and Social Capital



## Intersectionality:

A feminist framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege



## "Unpaid" labour:

Non-market work that doesn't receive direct remuneration. Forms of work like domestic labor, that occurs inside or pertains to households, or emotional labour which involves managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job.



## Social Capital:

The positive product of human interaction. Tangible assets that account for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social interactions among the individuals and families who make up a social unit

## Eight Forms of Currency

| Capital              | Currency                        | Complexing to...                                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Social Capital       | Connections                     | influence, relationships                         |
| Material Capital     | Materials: "natural" resources  | tools, buildings, infrastructure                 |
| Financial Capital    | Money                           | financial instruments & securities               |
| Living Capital       | Carbon, Nitrogen, Water         | soil, living organisms, land, ecosystem services |
| Intellectual Capital | Ideas, Knowledge                | words, images, "intellectual property"           |
| Experiential Capital | Action                          | embodied experience, wisdom                      |
| Spiritual Capital    | Prayer, Intention; Faith, Karma | spiritual attainment                             |
| Cultural Capital     | Song, Story, Ritual             | community                                        |

## Public Libraries under Capitalism

1

Public libraries are a victim of a shift in capitalism, for they have become "unnecessary expenses" which hinder the need for increased profits.

2

Libraries are shifting from public service organizations to business and profit models that lead to the destruction of a public space.

3

The public library is one of the few settings where people can enter for free, access materials for free and stay without being expected to buy anything.

**There is a business saying, "what gets measured, gets managed." But who decides what gets measured? If it doesn't have market value, it doesn't matter!**

Our economic system must shift to focus on bettering the lot of the average person. This new type of capitalist economy is geared toward maximizing human well-being and fulfillment. Where forms of "unpaid" labour are accounted for and worked into policies on all levels. Instead of having our humanity subverted to serve the marketplace, capitalism has to be made to serve human ends and goals. When we begin to think about responsible capitalism or human-centric capitalism, we can start to re-engineer how businesses and organizations are structured; where profit margins are not the primary goal. The emphasis, while still maintaining a working organization, would be on social capital. Here, we can look to feminist forms of bureaucracy to foster the value of public libraries not only in the materials they lend and the non-commercial model they embody, but in the commons that they represent: A public area that offers all people liberated intellectual spaces and the potential for community dialogues and organizing.

## Feminist Bureaucracy

Feminist bureaucracies are less hierarchical because they are philosophically guided by intersectionality, consensus, empowerment and most importantly dissonance.

- The vertical dimension of organization connects directly to the concept of control. Hierarchical arrangements thus reflect the major way in which control is sought through organization structure and design.
- Feminists have long objected to the kind of power relations that bureaucracy engenders; a hierarchy of authority that gives some members power over others.
- Feminist organizations rejecting bureaucracy have adopted rotational job system, flattened/horizontal, systems of paid labour, and other more consensus-driven working environments
- However, abuses of power can occur in any organizational structure. Treating customers rudely, exploiting subordinates, making racist slurs, and passing over qualified women have per se nothing to do with bureaucracy.
- A feminist bureaucracy is purposefully dissonant. The dissonance is caused by the conflict between hierarchy and consensus, and requires continuous accommodation. Those higher in the hierarchy "leaders" use power in full awareness that their actions may be challenged by those lower in the hierarchy, "followers" without reprimand. This dissonance keeps "power" structures in check..
- Feminist bureaucracy organizations are not bureaucracies in a classical sense because they are guided philosophically by the principles of equality/equity, acceptance of diversity and inclusion, and individual empowerment, not profit margins nor monetary productivity.
- The idea of "Professional" expanded to include emotion and private needs; rationality- emotionality balance
- The benefits of a feminist bureaucracy extend beyond the workplace (the public library) and its policies, extending into community relations where the social capital of the library itself and it patrons can be further developed.



**" Social capital emerges out of the public library's role as a 'community meeting place'. Libraries may be an important location for creating social cohesion and trust in the community "**

**By truly embracing the tenants of feminist bureaucracies, like, intersectionality, consensus, empowerment and dissonance, public libraries and their informed staff are more able to positively engage with their immediate communities and patrons by:**

- working with voluntary associations
- Developing their current capacity as impartial and informal meeting places
- Developing their role as the providers of universal public services
- Increasing accessibility to new user groups within the community by understanding and respecting the existing cultural and social capital of an "ethnic" group



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