

Trust in Libraries and Trust in Most People: Social Capital Creation in the Public Library

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ABSTRACT

Studies of the creation of social trust and social capital indicate that informal social contact has a positive effect. Some studies find that uncorrupt public institutions have positive effects on trust and social capital. Additionally, a number of papers show that public libraries have a similar effect. The mechanisms that generate trust, however, remain largely unspecified. Therefore, research describing micro-level processes is needed to uncover the mechanisms creating trust. This article reports a study of change in social trust among first-generation Mexican immigrants who participated in English as a second language (ESL) classes, computer classes, and civics classes in six US public libraries. These students displayed little trust outside their family and friends; however, after participating in library programs, they became more trusting of the library, the librarians, their fellow students, and other library users. These effects can be considered a starting point for a spiral of increasing generalized trust among the students.

Social capital refers to the value of social relations. Robert D. Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (1993, 167). Trust in others is a core component of social capital (Coleman 1988; Fukuyama 1995). Trust comes in two forms: (1) trust in most people—that is, trust in strangers—called generalized trust and (2) trust in people one is more or less acquainted with, called particularized trust or strategic trust (Uslaner 2002). When applied to the relations of social groups, generalized trust promotes the opening up of the group and the creation of relationships with people outside the group. Thus, generalized trust generates the bridging of social capital (Putnam 1995, 2000). Particularized trust, meanwhile, tends to strengthen within-group trust and group in-

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ternal relationships, which creates bonding social capital. Generalized trust is the key indicator of the civic component of social capital and is uniformly used in comparing trust between nations. It is regarded as a robust indicator of social capital (Bjørnskov 2006; Delhey, Newton, and Welzel 2011).

Economic growth, democracy, uncorrupt public institutions, individual health and well-being, and most other social indicators are strongly related to society-wide levels of social integration, generalized trust, and social capital (Granovetter 1973, 1985; Putnam 1993, 2000, 2004; Knack and Keefer 1997; Helliwell and Putnam 2004; Hutchinson and Vidal 2004; Wakefield and Poland 2005; Rothstein and Stolle 2008). By implication, knowledge of factors that contribute to increasing levels of social capital and trust are important for individual well-being and societal development.

Research on social capital and generalized trust has concentrated on two main sets of explanations for trust generation: (1) a societal perspective focusing on social interaction in voluntary associations and informal interaction (Putnam 1993, 2000) and (2) an institutional perspective focusing on the effects of universalistic and impartial public institutions and democracy (Kumlin and Rothstein 2005; Rothstein and Stolle 2008). Previous studies have provided evidence in support of both perspectives, but the overall results of the research in this area remain inconclusive regarding the direction of causality and the mechanisms at work. Most research on trust and social capital has been based on quantitative studies that are not well designed for establishing the identity of the mechanisms that create trust and social capital and, therefore, are by themselves insufficient for increasing knowledge of these causal mechanisms. Qualitative empirical descriptions of the mechanisms at work make it possible to address the generation of trust and social capital question appropriately. In principle, public libraries are simultaneously universalistic public institutions and places for meetings, whether informal ones among library patrons or more formalized meetings regarding library programs that involve contact with staff and program teachers (Vårheim, Steinmo, and Ide 2008). As such, libraries provide a relevant case for studying the mechanisms that generate social trust and social capital.

In the literature, public libraries have been described as producers of trust and social capital as they offer universal access to information services, treat all patrons equally, and provide a meeting place available to everyone (Vårheim 2007). Libraries have been portrayed as institutions that enhance individual knowledge, community building, and empowerment by investing in people and communities rather than in technology alone (Caidi 2006). Additionally, by increasing the cultural competence of librarians, libraries have become more capable in serving otherwise underserved populations, thus making the public library a truly universal institution (Overall 2009). Public library services are universal services, but this does not mean that some societal groups do not use public libraries more than others, and their information needs are served better by the library. To make universality real, underserved

populations and communities need to be included in library programming (see, e.g., Singh 2008; Pateman and Williment 2013).

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This article contributes theoretically and empirically to the literature on public libraries and social capital. Theoretically, the article argues that social trust and social capital are created through both social contacts and actors' experiences of institutions as fair and impartial. Furthermore, the trust generated in formal and informal social meetings is reinforced when social meetings take place within a trustworthy public institution open for all, that is, institutions perceived as fair and impartial and as open safe places. Public libraries are perhaps the most likely candidate to fulfill such criteria. Empirically, by means of qualitative interviews with library patrons participating in library programs and librarians responsible for such programs, this study explores the social mechanisms that create trust. Few studies have made any causal claims regarding whether public libraries create social trust, and fewer, if any, have tried to empirically describe the causal mechanisms by which public libraries create social capital.

Numerous studies have supported the claims that informal social contacts create trust (Kumlin and Rothstein 2010). Several studies have likewise supported the theory that impartial public institutions have positive effects on social trust patterns (Kumlin and Rothstein 2005, 2010; Rothstein and Stolle 2008; Dinesen 2013). Among these institutions are universalized social welfare institutions, such as those in Northern Europe, that provide the same services for everyone. The argument, therefore, is that people treated fairly and as equals through this learning experience become more trusting toward people in general, whereas institutions that target specific segments of clients have negative trust effects.

Public libraries are one type of universalized public institution that is especially suited for studying the impact of universalized institutions on social trust. Libraries are institutions based on the same universalized model across welfare regimes. This makes it possible to extend the scope and range of the institutional argument from Western Europe to most countries with developed public library systems, that is, most of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, including welfare systems, that rely primarily upon the provision of need-based services, for example, the United States. In sum, public libraries provide universalized services across a variety of welfare systems.

The fact that libraries are considered safe places and highly trusted institutions in studies in which both the population at large and library users were surveyed underscores the trust-generating potential of public libraries. In Australia, Eva Cox et al. (2000, 29) found that 98.7 percent of respondents evaluated public libraries as safe places. Among Swedish public institutions, only health services were more trusted than public libraries according to a nationwide survey (Höglund and Wahlström 2009, 19). In two surveys conducted in Norway

(2006 and 2011), respondents consistently ranked public libraries as the most trusted public institution, with the police coming in at second place.¹ Perhaps the strongest support that libraries are considered safe places is that in a 2013 Pew survey among American parents, 71 percent of the 79 percent of parents who think libraries are very important for their children state that a major reason for this is that they are safe places for children to be (Miller et al. 2013, 39–40). Adding to this, 91 percent of Arizona public library users in a ranking of library characteristics rated the safety of public libraries as either “very good” or “good” (Solop, Hagen, and Bowie 2007, 14–15). Only “librarian knowledge” scored higher, 92 percent.

Studying Trust and Public Libraries

The literature on public libraries and social trust is scarce (Vårheim 2007). Since 2007, however, several studies have been published on the topic (Vårheim et al. 2008; Johnson and Griffis 2009; Johnson 2010, 2012; Vårheim 2011, 2014).² Reporting macro-level data, Andreas Vårheim et al. (2008) found that the level of public library spending had an independent effect upon social trust within the OECD area. After analysis of survey data from three library branches in a US city, Catherine A. Johnson (2010, 150, 153) found no statistically significant correlations between public library use and generalized social trust, whereas, in a study of library users at three library branches and patrons of two shopping malls in a Canadian city, Johnson and Matthew R. Griffis (2009, 176) found a significant bivariate correlation. Drawing upon a national survey of the Swedish population in 2007, Lars Höglund and Eva Wahlström (2009, 17) found no significant correlation between the number of library visits and trust. Norwegian data from a 2011 survey of the population in three boroughs in Oslo corroborated the lack of individual-level effects of library use on generalized trust.³ Compared with the strong trust in the public library institution, the evidence that library use does not correlate positively with generalized trust can seem puzzling, especially considering that library users typically are more highly educated than nonusers (Sin and Kim 2008) and that highly educated people also are more trusting than others (Schyns and Koop 2010, 158). This does not mean, however, that public libraries do not increase trust levels among less educated users. This is indicated in the outcomes of public libraries for patrons with low education. Pertti Vakari and Sami Serola (2012, 41–42) found that less educated patrons benefit more from library use in their everyday activities; that is, their coping skills in daily life increase more than others’.

1. The data have been collected by the research project Public Libraries as Arenas for Citizenship (PLACE) at Oslo University College, the University of Tromsø, and Oslo School of Architecture and Design, in which the author participated.

2. There are other studies that focus mainly on public libraries as social meeting places (Aabø, Audunson, and Vårheim 2010; Audunson, Essmat, and Aabø 2011; Aabø and Audunson 2012). Kate Williams (2012) reveals how library services involving the use of digital media create new arenas for social capital generation.

3. These are data collected by the research project.

The findings that indicate a lacking correlation between library use and trust are from cross-sectional studies and are by themselves inconclusive about the trust-creating potential of the public library, either among library users at large or among specific groups of users. Such a conclusion would require the collection of panel data, that is, data for at least two points in time.

Even longitudinal survey data, however, would probably be insufficient for fleshing out the social mechanisms that create trust, especially in the case of public libraries where little is known about trust-generating processes and, as in this study, the informants are undocumented immigrants holding back personal information for obvious reasons. Panel survey data may reveal changes in trust and demonstrate indicated mechanisms, but one would still have to contend with the lack of direct knowledge of the actual trust-generating mechanisms and processes; this may result in problems of spuriousity and endogeneity, meaning failure to account for possible independent variables and complex interaction effects (Bennett and Elman 2006). Simply put, the collection of survey data with a lack of knowledge about the questions to be asked decreases the probability of tapping the relevant data on the mechanisms of trust. Using qualitative data—in this case, interview data—makes it possible to closely understand the social processes and is better suited for revealing causal mechanisms.

Vårheim (2011) interviewed public library directors with regard to programs for immigrants in their libraries and described some of the context regarding possible trust-creating mechanisms. The libraries that were part of this study provided classes for learners of English as a second language (ESL), computer skills, and civics. The recruitment strategies, organization, and operation of the programs indicated that by providing opportunities for informal contact and enhancing language skills and knowledge, they were well designed for generating trust among the class participants and between the students and public libraries as institutions. One qualitative study of social capital creation in rural Canadian libraries confirmed that regular interaction with librarians and library users increases trust in the library institution among less privileged groups of patrons (Griffis and Johnson 2013). On the other hand, rural libraries seemed to be more excluding regarding these groups than urban libraries.

The present study researches the possible mechanisms creating trust among students participating in library programs. One must engage in intensive interviews to trace possible trust-creating processes. Changes in the trusting attitudes of students, evidenced by students' stories describing how such changes occurred, will reveal whether and how trust is created, along with the identity of the mechanisms that facilitate change.

To discover whether and how libraries contribute to the creation of social capital, the probability for observing changes in trust would be highest among first-generation immigrants with low levels of social trust. This category of immigrants has a long way to go with regard to building trust, and one would expect more incremental changes in people already possessing relatively high levels of trust. Immigrants coming from low-trust societies, how-

ever, have low levels of social trust upon entry into the United States, and the trust levels tend to stay low for their descendants as well, for example, Mexican immigrants compared to the majority population (Klesner 2003; Putnam 2007; Algan and Cahuc 2010).

Additionally, it is known that immigrants from poor backgrounds and of undocumented status have even lower trust levels. In a study of Mexican farmworkers in Idaho, Maria L. Chávez, Brian Wampler, and Ross E. Burkhart (2006) found that only 5 percent trusted people in general, while nearly 25 percent of the US Hispanic population trusted most people. Low English language proficiency and a low educational level among the farmworkers were the factors explaining the difference in trust. Thus, the immigrant population studied should be a social group in which possible changes in social trust can be detected. The fact that research shows that trust levels in this group in the United States tend to remain relatively low over generations makes significant change in generalized trust in the immigrant population outstanding, that is, observable and potentially important for explaining the contribution of public libraries and public institutions in the generation of social trust.

In contrast, generalized trust among immigrants in Europe over time tends to converge to the levels of the native population, and for second-generation immigrants, trust levels are nearly at national averages. Immigrants bring with them the trust levels of their home country; but, over time, immigrants to Europe adapt to the trust levels of the host country. Second-generation immigrants are nearly as trusting in strangers as natives. Also, trust levels of first-generation immigrants show significant increases over time and culminate at around 80 percent of the majority population (Hooghe 2009; Dinesen 2010). As a result it is more difficult to isolate factors contributing to trust building in the European context.

Data and Methodology

This article reports the results of a study of trust and social capital among first-generation Mexican immigrants to the United States who participate in public library programs, among which most of the student participants were undocumented/unauthorized/illegal immigrants. The processes and mechanisms creating generalized trust are not well known. Trust creation in public libraries is even less well known. An in-depth case study is required for discovering possible trust-generating processes. In line with this explorative focus, data collection was carried out by means of unstructured interviews, which are suitable procedures for explorative research.

Process tracing is as an established case study methodology for discovering causal mechanisms and enabling analytical generalization for strategically chosen cases (George and McKeown 1985; Hall 2003; Steinmo 2008). Both public libraries and undocumented Mexican immigrants are strategically chosen. In tracing the processes or mechanisms by which trust is created, it is possible to determine whether public library programs can contribute in the building of generalized trust among Mexican immigrants to the United States. It could

be argued that the engaging of undocumented Mexican immigrants through library programs is one of the least likely scenarios for trust creation in public libraries, if not the least likely. On the other hand, being unlikely makes possible changes in trust more pronounced and more observable. If we accept that trust building among Mexican immigrants is the least likely scenario (a “deviant case” in the jargon of case study methodology (Emigh 1997; George and Bennett 2005), the generation of trust in other library programs involving less marginalized groups would be a probable, although not a necessary, effect. Effects of library programs on trust among high-trusting groups can be expected to be lower, if at all discernible. Another aspect of a deviant case is its distinctiveness; even a little change in trust would appear as an anomaly and is therefore more easily detectable.

While the ambitions of contextual generalization remain, this study has a clearly explorative emphasis. Few studies, if any, have systematically investigated the processes in generating trust among immigrant library users. Results from an explorative study are often the initial part of a larger project for building theory (Gerring 2007; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). The single-case study format is often a precursor for further case studies using qualitative data, quantitative data, or a combination of both (Emigh 1997; George and Bennett 2005), pursuing theoretical or statistical generalization (Yin 1989).

In the context of a new area of research, a relatively low number of individual informants are considered reasonable. Still, the study aimed for variation among students for criteria such as age and gender. The libraries assisted the author in the selection of the students.

Fourteen students and eleven librarians were interviewed; all students were first-generation Mexican immigrants. The students participated in three different library programs: ESL classes, computer classes, and/or civics classes. Six library systems in the state of Colorado, varying in size and located in different parts of the state, including Denver, were selected for study. The author conducted the interviews in June and July of 2008. Two open interview guides were used: one for the program librarians and one for the students (see the appendix).

Librarians were asked open-ended questions regarding recruitment of students and organization of library programs, the backgrounds of program participants, and their impressions of library use, interaction, and trust levels among students. Students were asked open-ended questions about their background, how they were recruited, their opinions on the programs, library use, trust in the library, trust in and interaction with fellow students, and interactions with library patrons, with their neighbors, and with people in general. However, employing an unstructured interview methodology means that these questions were the starting points for further inquiry and for more fine-tuned questions.

Uncomplicated general questions created a good ambience for dialogue beyond the required answers and seemed to elicit straightforward responses and valuable data. In some of the student interviews, one of the program librarians participated as a translator to help interpret parts of the conversation. This may have influenced student responses, but the

interviewer did not notice any bias arising from this. Most interviews took place in library meeting rooms. One interview was conducted at a student's home. The interviews were taped and notes were taken.

Findings

The library programs are described in this section. The description of the programs includes the students, the services, the recruitment of students, and the students' use of the library. Additionally, the changes in the students' trust levels toward classmates, the library, other users, and people in general are reported.

Programs

The Students

The program librarians stated that most of the students participating in their programs were Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico. Students were mostly restaurant personnel and blue-collar workers. More than two-thirds of the students were women; "men are working as much as possible" was given as the reason for the lower level of male participation in these programs.

The fourteen students (ten women and four men) interviewed had been in the United States for between two and eighteen years; the median stay was seven years. All students were born in Mexico and most originated from the province of Chihuahua, which borders Texas and New Mexico. The students' ages ranged from twenty-seven to thirty-five years. For most of their time in the United States, the students had been employed mainly as unskilled workers in restaurants; some had found employment in meat processing plants. Most students had six to nine years of formal education; one student possessed a high school diploma from Mexico, and one student had acquired a General Educational Diploma (GED, which gives that student access to postsecondary education) in the United States. From contextual evidence, nearly all of the students (except for one who explicitly said she was a documented immigrant) appeared to be undocumented immigrants. Three students were single mothers. Some students sent money to their families in Mexico.

The Service

The program librarians viewed programs for immigrants as "always changing with the times, and responding to needs; [the library] has to be ahead of developments, has to decide who to serve, has to get out for this" (librarian 1; librarian 2). In these statements, a strong commitment to the universal ideals of the public library "being for all" was expressed. More instrumentally, classes were viewed as recruiting devices for libraries: "Classes attract new people; they are 'a hook' to get people to the library" (librarian 1). With huge numbers of immigrants, public libraries see the potential in adult education for expanding their patronage; "although it is costly, it is important" (librarian 1). English literacy classes and computer liter-

acy classes were built on the idea of empowerment through information and the building of resources inside the local community. For example, these programs were regarded as relevant resources for starting businesses and increasing access to health information (librarian 8).

Programs in the form of formal classes for immigrants in the public libraries studied were typically ESL classes, computer classes, and citizenship classes. Not all libraries offered all three classes, but every library offered at least two of the programs. Computer classes were sometimes conducted in Spanish. Bilingual programs also existed, but “actually little in Spanish” (librarian 8). One library had its own GED class. In addition, ESL classes and computer skills classes were sometimes combined. Instructors of ESL classes are often retired teachers who volunteer; other categories of volunteers find the work rewarding and good for their résumés. The libraries also hire teachers. One consideration when planning services is to avoid competition with local providers of adult education. “We don’t have ‘classes,’ but ‘programs’; we have no tests, we create customers for other providers at a later stage” (librarian 1). “We prepare students for formal ESL classes [not organized by the library]. Our focus is not tests, but conversation. We let the students make friends and provide a safe environment” (librarian 4). Perhaps in line with this strategy, or because it is conducive to student success, courses are often conducted in a one-to-one setting. This feature was popular with the students: “They are very happy with that” (librarian 7). These programs do not have a long history. For example, one of the libraries studied began offering ESL classes in 1996. The libraries also provide activities for children when a parent (mostly women) attends class.

What did the students think of the classes? How were the classes evaluated? The students all learned English, found the classes useful, and enjoyed being in class. The usefulness of the classes was emphasized. “To get on, to improve job opportunities, I need English and need knowledge about technology [computers],” said José Luis (computer class).⁴ “Important for job, need general knowledge not be left behind,” said Juan (computer class). “To become a student of psychology my English must improve,” said María Guadalupe (advanced English class). Margarita said she learned English and computer skills, and “I like the teacher and the immigrant librarian, I get new friends, good persons in the library” (combined English and computer class). Many of the students had attended more than one of the three program categories. Some students had dropped out of more formalized language courses outside of the library because of difficulties with catching up after absences due to work or having to look after children.

Recruitment

Recruitment spanned a wide array of activities. Recruitment drives included participation in community festivals, family nights, and parent-teacher nights. For example, one library had a booth at a car show to distribute car repair information (librarian 1). Networking with

4. Students’ names were made anonymous.

immigration agencies, community leaders, and school district outreach workers provides libraries access to the planning of events (librarian 8). “Agencies find people that are positive, receptive” (librarian 2). Meetings for prospective students are also held in family homes. Immigrant librarians visit children’s clinics, schools, churches, and low-income housing areas. They knock on doors and distribute fliers in restaurants and shops. Library card drives in neighborhoods and schools are often part of the recruitment process.

In general, the librarians interviewed found that ESL classes are so well known that word of mouth is the best form of marketing for most student groups. However, newly arrived immigrants tend to stay within their community, so to expose them to new kinds of activities requires more elaborate marketing strategies.

Most of the students interviewed had been recruited by their friends, who either had attended courses or had come to know about the courses from other sources. One student was recruited by a neighbor, another by their children’s school, and one came to the library for books. Word of mouth has been the most important factor in nearly all cases.

Usage

All librarians reported increases in library use as a result of the library programs: “It’s compelling stories” (librarian 9). Other effects were related to the recruitment of children and extended families as library users. Students enrolled in new courses; they helped as volunteers and translators in the library along with marketing. Also, “the programs help people cope, help to bridge gaps between families, help in creating understanding that people had a life before, and make use more frequent” (librarian 7).

Students say they utilize the library more after attending programs. The frequency of use has increased for everyone. Even though some students can only come for the classes (mainly due to work obligations), most are present in the library one hour before class. Some had never entered the library before becoming a program student: “I never visited the library before, can only come for classes, I come one hour before class” (Margarita). “I didn’t use the library before, no English before” (Verónica). Some students had never entered a library before arriving in the United States. Various reasons were given regarding their nonuse of libraries in Mexico. “I never used and really knew about the library before,” said Elizabeth, “back home there was only the university library, only for highly educated people.” In addition to the lack of public libraries, the general situation for women in Mexican society was described as stressful: “My husband didn’t want me to come to the library. He don’t think reading is important; usual in Mexico is ‘Machismo’; women are to bring up children, cook and clean: I was also working, but enjoyed reading. Now, I’m divorced” (Margarita). This is but one example of how the women’s situations have changed.

Another example portraying this change is Elizabeth’s story. Elizabeth was the only one of the students who stated that she was a documented immigrant. Her status may be part of the

explanation for her courage. She lived with her husband and two children in a basement apartment. She was interviewed alone in her home by the author, who was accompanied by the program librarian. Her husband did not like her visiting the library. Elizabeth had ten years of schooling when she arrived from Mexico and later acquired a GED. She had attended a variety of library programs. At the time of the interview, she was an instructor of a cosmetics course at the library. Her goal had always been establishing a beauty salon; she worked part-time in one such establishment. The next step was to obtain cosmetology training before setting up her own salon, “and then I’m going to divorce this husband.”

Not every student used their local library intensively, because of time constraints and other community activities that they attended. “I use the library for the children. I have no time in the library for myself now or earlier, too busy working. I have books from my Church [Pentecostal]. Three days a week I go to bible studies, also vacation school with the Church” (Alejandra). The data, however, give a clear impression that the overall use of the libraries had increased after students started attending programs: “I feel comfortable in the library now, the staff is helpful, thought it was only for educated people, much educated” (Margarita).

The library material checked out by the program students consisted mainly of children’s books and movies, but also novels in both English and Spanish, fact books about American culture, audio books, music, magazines in both English and Spanish, and comics. Some students wanted more access to Spanish-language literature. Some also used the library for Internet access and to practice their newly acquired computer skills.

Trust

“Students are nervous at start” (librarian 1). “Some students don’t trust the library” (librarian 4). “We don’t ask about immigration status” (librarian 10). Trust is especially low among undocumented immigrants who see libraries as signaling danger in the same manner as any other government institution (librarian 3). These immigrants, mostly from Latin America, are generally suspicious of the government and have little knowledge of public libraries in the US context (librarian 9). According to the program librarians, one basis initiating the library’s trust-building process could be the student’s trust in a friend’s recommendation of a library course (librarian 2). In this scenario, the trust in the friend lowers the perceived risk of visiting the library for the new student. In addition, in comparison with other institutions, libraries are regarded as one of the safest places to visit (librarian 7).

The general impression of the program librarians was that programs create trust in the library among the participants. Program librarians observed effects of the trust-building process in student behavior. One mechanism was described as crucial. “Trust comes from knowledge.” The acquisition of language skills, computer skills, and skills necessary for navigating American society (e.g., access to health information) breeds confidence and makes students employable (librarian 8). Many students are looking for work or for better

work, and “libraries don’t dictate what you learn like the school, in the library you are free to learn what you want” (librarian 8). “Access to real information creates trust, students are more confident, they speak; more resources [knowledge] create trust and increase risk-taking; trust in the library spills over into other institutions” (librarian 1). Another mechanism of trust building is interaction within the student group. “They speak more, seem more confident, are more open, more coping, no more low profiles in class, seem to care more about the world, ask for opinions on news items” (librarians 1 and 2). “Many become friends, especially people with kids; we arrange social events, potluck parties” (librarian 7). Additionally, bonds between patrons and librarians are created. “Patrons tell about their personal problems” (librarian 1), and students have great trust in teachers (librarian 1). Many librarians, however, witnessed little contact between students and other library patrons. “The library is not seen as a social setting; churches and homes are the only safe havens” (librarian 8).

It was difficult for the librarians to determine whether trust in the library, in librarians, and in fellow students is transferred into neighborhood trust and/or trust in people in general. Yet the librarians had a clear impression that immigration status is crucial for the students’ generalized trust (librarian 9).

The students say they come to library programs to learn and to obtain better jobs (e.g., to be promoted from washing dishes to working as a waiter, wherein the latter requires English language skills). They require computer skills and “general knowledge, not to get behind” (José Luis).

All of the students disclosed that they had come to place great confidence in the public library. “Too good to be true to be able to take things out, learning to type, useful material, English programs, to borrow means trust” (Margarita). “Only positive, good for the kids, free material, for everybody” (Alejandra). The students considered the public library a relatively safe place: “It is as safe as my home” (Leticia). It is also a place where they are treated as equals: “Very important for feeling comfortable, otherwise I would not have come” (Gabriela). “Everybody the same, treated well, everybody is nice,” and “It is also *gratis*” (Verónica). Students expressed their trust in the program teachers and the librarians. Some trusted the program teachers more than the librarians: “I know the teacher better, and I don’t want to speak English with the librarians,” said José Luis.

Trust in fellow program participants varied. “I doesn’t trust too much people [other students], doesn’t know them, I don’t see the people, [I] see the material” (Alejandra). “No change, don’t talk much with them” (Margarita). “Talk with other men from the same place as me” (Juan). “Si, talk about the library, the material, classes, about what we learn, other things that we want, [like] more advanced courses” (José Luis). “Talks with friends from class before class and after class” (Verónica). “I speak with people in class and some after class” (Elizabeth). “I have made friends with class people” (Gabriela).

Most students trusted library users in general. "I trust others because they are doing the same as me by being in the library," Leticia said. "Other people are good; I talk with different people" (Verónica). "Only trust in people [in the library] because they have same intentions" (María Guadalupe). Margarita had more trust in people she met in the library than other unknown people: "They are also trying to learn more." In the library, she saw that people were learning, were able to relax, and took their time: "They are different from the people I know." "Even though I don't relate to other users, I trust them more than neighbors because I don't know them either; the people in the library have good intentions when they are there." "When frustrated I go to the library, then I feel better, other people are also there for empowerment" (Elizabeth). While Elizabeth spoke with fellow students, she did not speak with strangers in the library because her husband did not allow it. This was the case even though, according to Elizabeth, he was the one who initially introduced her to the library, had a library card of his own, and used the library frequently. Likewise, she was prohibited from being active in her church, although she attended service during the day when her husband was at work. "Men are jealous," she said.

"I trust everyone in the library, also the homeless. It is like the Church" (Gabriela). Gabriela went on to explain how she establishes relationships in the library. "When I see people more than once, I start talking about everything, recommend books, my reading club, and the English class." She also saw library visits as an opportunity to practice English. Alejandra, however, had little trust in people she did not know, but because it was important for her children, she visited the library. "We talk a little, then I know from the attitude [whether the other is trustworthy]," said Juan. María Guadalupe speaks with strangers about books; she wants recommendations from them. Alejandra said she was very shy and normally did not respond when people tried to engage her in conversation in the library, but if the other person was interested in the same type of books as she was, she had a reason for conversation.

The students trusted neighbors only if they knew them; otherwise, "you have to be careful" (Gabriela). According to most students, they trusted unknown neighbors less than unknown library users. José Luis, however, thought that people he did not know, in the library or elsewhere, cannot be trusted: "Only trust when conversation."

Unknown people in general were trusted little by the students. It all came down to the question of knowledge of the other person. José Luis said, "Good and bad everywhere, but I am closer to people from my own country, our culture, language, and customs. Even so, I think American culture is noble and trustworthy, and because I am beginning to share this culture, I trust a little bit more. American culture has been a positive experience; in general you can trust people here." When the interviewees were asked whether they speak with strangers, some said they did. Juan said, "Yes, but not very often, mostly Americans like to talk."

Regarding effects on trust from library programming, students said they were more trusting toward strangers now than they were before, especially when it came to people they

meet in the library, but also people in general. "A little more trusting now, now I meet more people. I am more trusting when learning English" (Verónica). "The greatest problem for trust is the language barrier," said Juan. Students clearly tended to think they led better lives. They were coping because of the confidence and skills they acquired in the library. Margarita said she felt "smarter, safer, I'm learning," and "has a better life now, much, much better." She did not need "an interpreter in the store anymore."

Discussion

This study indicates that library programming contributes to increasing social trust among immigrants participating in the programs studied. The extent to which trust increases varies among students. The study identifies the mechanisms by which trust increases among the students.

When enrolling in the library programs, the students possessed very low levels of trust in both the library as an institution and in other people in general. The students were often recruited by their friends; these were perhaps the only people they trusted. The fact that friends knew of or used the library encouraged new students to enroll in the library programs. Most students had limited knowledge of public libraries and viewed them, as they would perceive any other government institution, as a potential danger zone. The initial knowledge of the libraries' trustworthiness thus comes from word of mouth. This finding indicates that at least for the recruitment of undocumented immigrants, it is advisable for libraries to work with former students as their ambassadors within communities.

Overall, trust is clearly knowledge-based among the students interviewed. If they trust their fellow students, it is because they have come to know them. Likewise, they have some trust in neighbors, but only in the neighbors they know. Librarians are trusted because they are known and because of what they do. Unknown people in the library are trusted because they are there for the same reasons as the students, and the students interact with other users on these bases.

Participating in the library program and visiting the library have made the students more trusting. Their scope for trust or space of trust has increased. As such, it can be claimed that the library programs studied create social trust. On the one hand, trust in the library and librarians, institutional trust, was created. Otherwise, the radius of trust has clearly been expanded outside the immediate family and friends, the most particularized trust. Students' trust became more generalized in that some fellow students became more trusted, and even wider in that unknown library users came to be trusted. Yet, the students remained untrusting toward unknown people in general, toward "most people." Very little generalized trust in this wide and proper sense was generated in the short term, although the ground for further increase in generalized trust seems to have been prepared. The mechanisms for creating trust are contact with teachers, librarians, fellow students, and library users in general. Trust is made through

informal or formal contact but within the institutional setting of the public library. The students stress the importance of the fact that they are treated as equals and with respect inside the library and not the least that the library can be trusted because it is a safe place to come. Thus, the reputation of the library as a place for all, initially conveyed by their friends, is now experienced by the students themselves. This reputation creates a spiral of trust. Although public libraries in general are not regarded as the most significant of public institutions, for these library program students on the sidelines of American society, libraries are an important public institution—an institution that creates a grain of trust outside their immediate family and closest friends, building bridges for potential further integration in society and for potential advancement in the labor market.

Conclusion

This exploratory study describes examples of how seeds of social trust are planted through library programming, ESL classes, computer classes, and civics classes. Additionally, the study reveals mechanisms of trust generation. Several more studies replicating these findings are needed. In this study, however, mechanisms for trust generation have been observed and found to work. Cases have been selected strategically. In short, if trust can be produced under the least likely circumstances of low-trusting undocumented immigrants in a need-based social welfare system, it can be produced among low-trusting groups in public libraries everywhere.

This study of public libraries shows how institutional mechanisms and contact mechanisms, when working together, increased the students' trust within the social context of the public library. The study found that little and insignificant trust in strangers outside the library context or generalized trust was created among students.

The students' perceptions of libraries as welcoming public institutions were reinforced by their friends' stories about positive experiences with programs and libraries. This way the students possessed a certain amount of institutional trust prior to joining library programs. A potential for further trust-enhancing experiences within the public library (and possibly in society at large) existed. Another mechanism that created trust in the library was interaction with librarians and program teachers generated by the formalized contact that follows from the library programming grounded in the institutional role of the library. Additionally, the classes provided ample space for interaction with other students; they even necessitated interaction with fellow students and further increased trust.

Gradually, many of the students even interacted with unknown library patrons, and the spiral of trust reached a new widened and general level. The students saw unknown patrons as persons seeking knowledge like themselves and therefore trustworthy. Thus, the students' social capital created within the library context can be the starting point for building trust with neighbors and strangers, truly generalized trust.

Strengthening the trust-creation potential of public libraries is research within social psychology that finds that contact between groups in general reduces prejudice with the exceptions of situations when people feel threatened by the other party and the contact was involuntary (Pettigrew et al. 2011; Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). Positive effects contact is enhanced further by “equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom” (Pettigrew 1998, 65). These requirements are not easily satisfied, but the public library programming studied in this article is perhaps one candidate that comes closer in satisfying these ideal criteria compared to most other arenas.

Which factors in libraries are therefore the most important in creating social trust? Public libraries as universalized public institutions create the formal institutional framework for trust creation, while the actors within the institution create the programs. Both are necessary for interaction among users to occur, as are the relationships between course teachers and students, and between librarians and students. Contact creates trust under the right circumstances. Within the institutional parameters of the public library as described in this article, trust is created. However, actors create programs. Given that these types of programs do not exist in every public library in locations with immigrant populations within or outside the United States, policy choices by library management are important. Library organizations that are aware that the requirements of a universalized institution extend into the environment of nonpatrons possess the best opportunities for creating trust.

Appendix

User (Student) Interview Guide

1. How were you recruited to the classes?
2. Do you like the classes and/or find them useful?
3. Did you use the library before you started in class?
4. Do you use the library more now?
5. What kind of use?
6. Do you trust the library more now?
7. Do you trust other people in class? More now?
8. Do you trust other library users? More Now?
9. Do you meet others in the library?
10. What kind of contact do you have with them?
11. Do you trust your neighbors? More now?
12. Do you trust people in general? More now?

Program Librarian Interview Guide

1. What kind of programs do you run?
2. How do you view the library as a meeting place?
3. How do you recruit program students?
4. What ethnic groups are dominant?
5. How would you evaluate the students' library use? Any changes?
6. How would you evaluate the students' trust in the library? Any changes?
7. How would you evaluate the students' trust in others? Any changes?
8. How would you evaluate their coping skills? Any changes?

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