

Mitigating the Challenges and Capitalizing on Opportunities: A Qualitative Investigation of the Public Library's Response to an Aging Population

Kaitlin Wynia Baluk, Meridith Griffin,  and James Gillett 

Department of Health, Aging, and Society, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

RÉSUMÉ

Les bibliothèques publiques sont des carrefours communautaires qui permettent à la fois de créer des opportunités et de répondre à certains des défis rencontrés chez les personnes âgées, dans le contexte du vieillissement de la population. Dix-huit entretiens approfondis ont été menés avec des bibliothécaires publics, et les données ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Cette étude examine les pratiques courantes et les difficultés associées à l'élaboration de programmes destinés aux personnes âgées. Cette analyse est complétée par une exploration environnementale de ce type de programmes, tels qu'offerts dans les bibliothèques membres du Conseil des bibliothèques urbaines du Canada (CBUC). Les résultats indiquent que les bibliothécaires publics s'appuient sur des partenariats communautaires et sur la formation du personnel pour développer une programmation qui favorise la culture numérique, financière, linguistique et sanitaire, ainsi que pour créer des occasions de connexion sociale entre les générations et entre pairs. Ils font aussi face à des défis liés aux limites d'espace, de budgets et de compétences du personnel, à la prise en compte d'intérêts variés et souvent divergents des différents groupes fréquentant les bibliothèques, et à la promotion de programmes destinés aux personnes âgées. Les résultats démontrent que les bibliothèques publiques peuvent être des acteurs clés lorsqu'il s'agit d'atténuer les défis associés au vieillissement de la population, et permettent de mettre en évidence les nombreux avantages de la valorisation et de la prestation de services à cette population.

ABSTRACT

Public libraries are community hubs that can both create opportunities and address challenges often associated with later life and population aging. Using a thematic analysis of 18 in-depth interviews with public librarians, this study investigates common practices and challenges experienced while developing programs for older adults. This analysis is augmented by an environmental scan of older-adult programming offered in member libraries of the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC). Results indicate that public librarians leverage community partnerships and staff training to develop programs that foster digital, financial, language, and health literacy and create opportunities for both intergenerational and peer social connection. At the same time, they face challenges related to limited space, budgets, and staff capacity, difficulty meeting the extensive and often conflicting interests of various groups within the library, and marketing programming to older adults. Findings indicate that public libraries may be key players in mitigating challenges often associated with having an aging population, and indeed highlight the many benefits of valuing and providing services to this population.

* This study is supported by an Individual Partnership Engage Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) that was awarded to Meridith Griffin. This study was conducted in partnership with the Hamilton Public Library in Hamilton, Ontario. We thank the Alzheimer Society of Brant, Haldimand Norfolk, Hamilton Halton for their assistance in constructing the interview guide.

Manuscript received: / manuscrit reçu : 22/06/2019

Manuscript accepted: / manuscrit accepté : 03/09/2020

Mots-clés : vieillissement, bibliothèque publique, programmes pour les personnes âgées, vieillissement de la population, isolement social, âgisme

Keywords: aging, public library, older adult programs, population aging, social isolation, ageism, social institutions

La correspondance et les demandes de tirés-à-part doivent être adressées à : / Correspondence and requests for offprints should be sent to:

Kaitlin Wynia Baluk, M.A.
 Department of Health, Aging, and Society
 McMaster University
 Kenneth Taylor Hall, Rm 220
 1280 Main Street West.
 Hamilton, Ontario
 L8S 4L8.
 Canada
 (wyniak@mcmaster.ca)

Introduction

With the aging of the population, there has been a fresh focus on the unique value of and issues with programming for older adults in public libraries (Dalmer, 2017; Horton, 2019; Joseph, 2009). Public libraries have the potential to be loci of sociocultural connection and lifelong learning (Decker, 2010; Sabo, 2017). Older adults experience and gain access to spaces for learning, leisure, and social connection via the courses, activities, events, and organized social groups that comprise public-library adult programming (Kleiman, 2012). The research presented here investigated the promising practices enacted and the challenges public librarians face when developing these courses, activities, events, and organized social groups. By disseminating knowledge and resources, and by providing opportunities for social connection, public libraries represent a key institution that is primed to address challenges often associated with aging at both an individual and a community level and to facilitate spaces where communities can benefit from the skill sets and knowledge of older adults.

At the community level, public libraries play a central role in supporting democratic principles (Audunson et al., 2019). By bringing diverse groups of people together, public libraries have the potential to reinforce community cohesion, identity, and action (Buschman, 2003; Vårheim, 2007). They can be deemed “assets” that generate cultural, social, and relational benefits for a community by providing financially accessible and safe places for vulnerable and disadvantaged social groups (Aabø, Audunson, & Vårheim, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Oliphant, 2014, p. 358). Furthermore, public librarians offer information and teach skills that can bridge social divisions and increase social capital (Jaeger, Taylor, & Gorham, 2015; Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Griffis, 2009). Johnson and Griffis (2009) draw on Putnam (2000) to define social capital as the value derived from one’s social networks, and which is composed of both trust and reciprocity, or the expectation that one can work with others without betrayal and that one’s good deeds will be repaid. As public librarians and their community

partners strive to promote health literacy among community members, or the capacity to understand and use information about health, both Morgan et al. (2016) and Rubenstein (2016) portray public libraries as institutions that can foster positive health outcomes. The potential for public libraries to stimulate democratic action, increase social capital, and enhance population health renders these institutions well positioned to mitigate concerns about the perceived economic and health care challenges associated with population aging.

Population aging also challenges public libraries to adapt their programs, services, and resources to meet the needs of individual community members (Horton, 2019). As older adults adapt to changes in their health and social conditions, later life may bring both new challenges and opportunities. These changing conditions may be related to retirement, rapid technological advancements, and declining mobility and health (Gorry, Gorry, & Slavov, 2018; Hargittai, Piper, & Morris, 2018; Steptoe, de Oliveira, Demakakos, & Zaninotto, 2014). Public librarians often tailor programming to support older adults in later life by assisting with research and education on topics of interest (health, hobbies, care homes, retirement finances), providing training in emerging skill areas (Internet use, social media), and offering free local recreational and educational programming (Bennett-Kapusniak, 2013; Decker, 2010). Joseph (2009) and Decker (2010) also draw attention to how public libraries can ease the transition from employment to retirement by offering a social space outside of one’s private home.

Although public libraries act as loci of knowledge and sociocultural connection, they may need to innovate in order to meet the needs of Canada’s growing and diverse older-adult population. Bennett-Kapusniak (2013), Dalmer (2017), and Sabo (2017) underline the need for older-adult advisory committees and older-adult liaison librarians to inform programming for this demographic. Dalmer (2017) also calls for a critical assessment of the language used to talk about the “sixty-five years of age and older” group and the heterogeneity that

characterizes it (p. 15). Because of the unique health and social needs of older adults in comparison with other age groups, Horton (2019) and Joseph (2009) highlight how an aging population compels public libraries to foster financial capacity and the expertise to best support the well-being of this growing demographic.

Research on Canadian public-library efforts to support the well-being of older adults is generally narrowly focused; for example, looking at how older adults engage in digital literacy training. It is also geographically limited or outdated (e.g., Allen & Wilkinson, 1990). This study builds on this research to offer a more current and expansive understanding of public-library programming for older adults across Canada. It investigates how a sample of 18 Canadian urban public libraries have responded to an aging population via programming. Although both rural and urban libraries have aging populations, they experience different challenges and levels of funding, and serve populations with differing informational and social needs. For example, Hughes (2017) points out that rural libraries have the added challenge of serving geographically dispersed populations and often have a smaller funding base than their urban counterparts.

We investigate how Canadian public libraries have responded to an aging population with the following question: “What are the common and promising practices for and the challenges faced when developing, executing, sustaining, and evaluating programs?” This research may be useful for gerontologists who explore the relationships between older adults and the social institutions in which they belong, and librarians interested in advancing library programs for their older library users. We conceptualized programming as the courses, activities, events, and organized social groups that take place within or are orchestrated by public librarians, promising practices as the processes and strategies commonly enacted by librarians to achieve a desired outcome, and challenges as the obstacles public librarians encounter that may encumber their efforts to develop programs for an older audience.

Methods

Study Design

This qualitative exploratory study was informed by community-based research principles, which is an approach to research that requires engagement with community partners in the process of identifying questions and objectives and determining appropriate methods, as well as in knowledge translation (Minkler, 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Community-based research often culminates in research outputs that are more relevant and useable than research that is conducted

without the input of the knowledge users (Minkler, 2005). This study was conducted in partnership with Hamilton Public Library (HPL) in Hamilton, Ontario. To assist in the development of research questions, our community partner also connected us with the Alzheimer Society of Brant, Haldimand Norfolk, Hamilton Halton, a local non-profit that works with HPL to offer older-adult library programs. Ethics clearance was granted by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board.

This project extends a collaboration between the principal investigators and HPL that began in 2014. The principal investigators and their colleagues have been collaborating with HPL on research projects related to older adults, marginalized communities (those experiencing homelessness, children with literacy challenges), and digital literacy/digital storytelling. It was through this existing process of collaboration that we recognized HPL’s research needs with respect to older-adult programming. HPL highlighted that they had seen past programs for older adults as “successful”, in that they witnessed participants developing social connections with others and acquiring knowledge and skills. Although HPL recognized the value of programming for older adults in relation to their institution’s goals, they also identified programming areas in which they would like to improve, such as programming for people living with dementia. As a first step in innovating their programming for older adults, HPL indicated that they would like to know how other libraries program for older adults and how they develop, execute, sustain, and evaluate this programming, as well as understanding the challenges that they face in this process. Specifically, HPL was interested in learning from institutions similar to their own; namely, members of the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC). CULC is a network with 46 library members, serving 70 per cent of Canada’s population (Canadian Urban Library Council, 2020). Its mandate is to serve and improve urban libraries in Canada through research, capacity building, and the exchange of knowledge.

Although this project is informed by community-based research principles, it should not be understood to be a pure example of this approach. HPL assisted with the development of the research questions, provided information about their programs, aided in participant recruitment, and provided opportunities for knowledge translation. They did not, however, participate in data collection or analysis. HPL’s reason for handing over leadership in these areas was related to their limited staff capacity. We were in communication with HPL monthly via e-mail, phone, and/or on-site meetings.

This study leveraged both an environmental scan of older-adult programming using public-library Websites and a thematic analysis of 18 in-depth interviews with

public librarians. In the environmental scan, we analyzed the descriptions of programs that older adults might attend, which were listed on Web sites, and in the thematic analysis, we analyzed the perspectives of Canadian public librarians interested in the field of older-adult library programming. We drew on Graham, Evitts, and Thomas-MacLean's (2008) and Larsen's (2013) conception of an environmental scan as a descriptive research approach to systematically collecting and organizing information about past and current circumstances internal and/or external to organizations. A researcher can use this information to make observations, which in turn can inform decision-making processes, increase awareness of issues that may impact an organization, and/or create a context and give direction for the development of future initiatives (Graham, et al. 2008). We also drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) conception of thematic analysis as a method used to identify, analyze, and describe patterns in qualitative data.

We conducted the environmental scan prior to interviewing so that we could use insights gained from the scan to ask informed questions and provide prompts about specific programs during the interviews. The process of systematically collecting and organizing information about programs led to an awareness of the specific programs offered by the libraries where each of the 18 participants was employed. The scan was also particularly helpful when determining what programs libraries provide for older adults, and the forms of community collaboration in which they engage. The thematic analysis was used to better understand funding opportunities, how community partnerships benefit older adults, the challenges of program development, and strategies for developing, executing, sustaining, and evaluating programs.

After conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews, we compared interview themes with the environmental scan observations to bolster the likelihood that we are representing the phenomenon under study comprehensively. Although not an exact portrayal of older-adult programming in Canada (see Limitations), the environmental scan provided insights into how the promising practices and challenges of program development uncovered in the thematic analysis might manifest themselves to the public on public Web sites. The scan, however, could not support or counter themes related to the internal work of public librarians, such as staff training, because this internal work is not publicized on public library Web sites.

Sampling

Purposive sampling provided an approach to recruiting participants who would be able to shed light on the

target phenomenon. We drew our samples for both the environmental scan and the thematic analysis from members of CULC. This scan therefore included all library Web sites from CULC members that offered older-adult programming ($n = 40$ out of the 44 member libraries). As all included libraries were CULC members, these libraries are all from urban library districts with populations of over 100,000 (Canadian Urban Library Council, 2020). We conducted the scan in June 2018 to provide a point-in-time perspective on recently past, present, and upcoming programs. The scan therefore includes programs offered at some libraries from January 2018 to August 2018.

HPL assisted in recruiting participants for in-depth interviews by first alerting CULC members about this study and by providing a list of contact information for 15 individuals who indicated an interest in participating. We chose to recruit staff within urban libraries because these libraries resemble the population size that HPL serves. Recruiting participants from libraries similar to our community partner increased the likelihood that findings would be relevant for them. We recruited participants with contact information provided by our community partner and public-library Web sites between July and October 2018. Interviews occurred between July and December 2018. From the 40 CULC libraries, 18 librarians participated, 18 did not respond, and 4 declined our invitation. Providing reasons for declining our invitation, the four public librarians cited being too busy with day-to-day work and the belief that their library did not offer programs for older adults and, therefore, that they had little to contribute. We did not heavily pursue a response from all 40 libraries because of both time limitations and our goal of recruiting librarians who are interested in the field of older-adult programming.

The 18 participants represented public-library systems across Canada, with the majority being from Ontario (Central Canada – 13, Western Canada – 3, and Atlantic Canada – 2). They held a variety of positions within their libraries, such as head librarian, program developer, manager of adult services, community outreach librarian, and community engagement director. Although the participants' levels of engagement with library users varied based on their positions, all participants indicated that they interacted with older adults in their day-to-day work. This engagement included ad-hoc customer interactions on the library floor. Thirteen of the 18 participants held positions in which they were actively engaged in developing, promoting, executing, and evaluating programs. Although the remaining five participants were less involved in delivering programming and engaging with their library's patrons directly because of the nature of their management positions, their positions allowed for a high vantage

point when considering programming needs, practices, and challenges. The diversity of positions and experiences of participants led to a more nuanced understanding of the development, execution, and evaluation of public-library programming.

Data Collection

The first phase of data collection was the environmental scan, which entailed searching the 40 library Web sites that contained descriptions of older-adult programs. We navigated to program descriptions via the “Events” or “Programs” pages of these 40 Web sites. We then organized program descriptions into a chart that specified the program titles, activities, locations, times offered, and community partners. The scan included all programs where an older adult would be welcome (intergenerational programming, adult programming, or older adult-specific programming). We documented a total of 691 programs, 78 of which specified that they were designated for an older-adult audience either in the title or the program description. Including all programs where older adults would be welcome ensured that we were capturing holistically the field of older-adult programming in Canada as opposed to only capturing programs that specify, or segregate, an older-adult audience. Older adults might attend a variety of library programs that do not have an age restriction.

During the second phase, we interviewed public librarians who identified themselves as being interested in the field of older-adult programming. Participants responded to our questions about the history of older-adult programming within their contexts, the programs that they saw as being the most and least popular, how they determine what older adults want from the library, how programs are dispersed within their library systems, how they fund and evaluate programs, the nature of their community partnerships, the effectiveness of staff training relevant to supporting older adults, the challenges they face, and what they would like to change or do more of in the future. The 18 interviews, primarily conducted over the phone apart from 2 that were conducted in person, ranged in length from 30 to 75 minutes.

Analysis

First, we used the environmental scan chart to make observations about the nature of programs that older adults might attend in public libraries. For example, we used this chart to make observations about common topics for informational events. To develop these observations, we counted programs related to their content and characteristics and noted community partners. After developing a list of broad observations from

the environmental scan, we then analyzed the interview transcripts with the aid of MAXQDA, a type of qualitative research software, and with the thematic analysis methods outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). In adherence to this method, the first author used initial coding to familiarize herself with the data. Initial codes are descriptive labels that relate to the research questions. These initial codes therefore centred around themes about promising practices and challenges related to developing, executing, sustaining, and evaluating public-library programs for an older audience.

The first author then proceeded to look for themes among the initial codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as “something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and that represents some level of patterned response or meaning” (p. 82). To ensure that the themes were well supported, each member of the research team compared them with the raw interview data. After completing the thematic analysis, we then considered how the descriptive environmental scan observations were aligned or misaligned with themes. For example, we compared the community partners documented in the environmental scan chart with the community partners discussed by participants.

Tracy’s (2010) criteria for trustworthy qualitative research served as a framework for conducting this study. According to Tracy (2010), sound qualitative research is marked by a worthy research topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution to the literature, ethical practices, and meaningful coherence. To ensure a worthy topic that is relevant, timely, significant, and interesting, to contribute meaningfully to the literature, and to ensure that our research would resonate with our target audience of librarians and gerontologists, we consulted with our community partner and conducted a literature review. Tracy (2010) emphasizes that rigor is evident when a study exemplifies “sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, samples, contexts, and data collection and analysis processes” (p. 840). Credibility also supports the notion that the research was conducted in a manner that generated plausible findings. Meaningful coherence is a criterion that speaks to the logic of the study design and the results. We sought to achieve these three criteria by ensuring that our findings were well supported with evidence, comparing and contrasting findings from the two methods, and ensuring that all members of the research team held consensus with the findings. This framework helped foster a reflexive awareness of our theoretical and methodological assumptions. It also led us to methodically document each step in the research process.

Results

The key themes from the thematic analysis reported here offer a response to the research question; “What are the common promising practices for and challenges faced when developing, executing, sustaining, and evaluating programs?” Where applicable, we outline the environmental scan observations that corroborated the themes. When quoting participants, we indicate the types of positions that they hold and the geographic location of their library systems (Western, Central, or Atlantic Canada). Themes related to challenges include limited space, geographic location, staff capacity, and financial resources; difficulty meeting the extensive and often conflicting interests of various groups within the library; and marketing programming to older adults. An overarching theme related to the promising practices was creating opportunities for intergenerational relationships, teaching skills and imparting knowledge, and fostering a welcoming environment with light refreshments to bridge social divisions within the community. Another key theme related to these practices was leveraging staff training, partnerships, and direct engagement with older adults to enhance programming. [Table 1](#) summarizes these themes.

Challenges: Limited Space, Geographic Location, Staff Capacity, and Financial Resources

Limited space and geographic location

The participating librarians discussed how their physical locations in their communities, limited spaces suitable for programming, and budget and library staffing constraints impeded program development. This was underscored when a librarian stated, “...we live in a city with 250,000 people but only 4 branches, which brings up issues of space” (Community Outreach Librarian, Western). Another asserted that “Some branches would love to offer this programming but just don’t have the space” (Program Developer, Central). When considering factors that might hinder older adults from participating in programs, interviewees highlighted transportation, weather, and time of day as key

Table 1: Summary of themes

	Theme
Challenges	Limited space, geographic location, staff capacity, and financial resources Difficulty meeting the extensive and sometimes conflicting needs within communities and among older adults Creating age-inclusive and anti-ageist marketing for targeted older-adult programs
Promising practices	Bridging social divisions with light refreshments, intergenerational programs, and digital literacy Leveraging community partners, staff training, and the perspectives of older adults to enhance programming

considerations. For example, they made statements such as: “We’re a convenient location if you live close by, but a lot of people will have to take multiple buses to get here” (Community Engagement Librarian, Central), and “...numbers are going down now because they don’t feel safe to come out” (Head Librarian, Atlantic). This latter statement was expressed during the onset of winter. Another stressed that “...parking is always an issue” (Services Supervisor, Central), highlighting that the built environment and associated structural limitations impacted their participation numbers.

Limited staff capacity and financial resources

The participating librarians also noted that what held them back with respect to older-adult programming was a lack of staff and financial resources to support programming needs. For example, an interviewee stated, “We have staffing capacity issues; we also have financial budget concerns” (Senior Services Director, Central). Another articulated that their library system is “...not always able to offer programming even if [they’d] like to because it just depends on space and staff resources” (Community Programmer, Western). The participating librarians expressed that they experienced a tension between recognizing what is ideal regarding older-adult programming, and what is realistic given described structural constraints.

Challenges: Meeting Diverse Needs

Diversity of programming needs among library users

In addition to navigating the tensions that arise from working within finite spaces, budgets, and staff capacities, interviewees also noted that they must navigate tensions around their capacity to offer programs that address all of their patrons’ diverse and unique interests. This was underscored when an interviewee stated, “...there are so many people who come to the library with different needs and we try to offer the best for each of them, but sometimes it’s very difficult” (Head of Adult Services, Atlantic). Meeting the diversity of programming needs within public libraries was also depicted as a “balancing act” (Community Engagement Director, Central). Another explained that “competition with other services within the library [was a] real challenge” when developing older-adult programming (Senior Services Director, Central).

When developing programs, interviewees highlighted age, language, gender, and socio-economic status as significant areas of diversity between and among library patrons. For example, one librarian noted “...the census shows at least 100 languages are spoken in our city” (Community Outreach Librarian, Western). Another described that “...we have to provide programming for all age groups and all needs and

sometimes those needs conflict" (Community Programmer, Western). This same librarian explained that "... we are such a diverse community and again we want to reach out to as many people as possible. It is constrained by things like I don't speak Mandarin" (Community Programmer, Western).

Diversity of programming needs among older-adult library users

This challenge was exacerbated by the diversity within the older-adult demographic. Interviewees made claims borne of this frustration, such as "...55+ is about three generations of people" (Community Engagement Manager, Central), and "...you can't really put seniors in one group" (Services Director, Central). Many interviewees thus articulated that addressing the programming needs of older adults was a challenge because the range of needs both within and external to this demographic are extensive and may even be in conflict. Attempts to meet the diversity of programming needs among older adults were evident within the environmental scan; libraries offered a range of programs that may be reflective of diverse communities. For example, within the environmental scan we found that libraries offer book clubs in a variety of languages. In light of evidence to suggest that libraries make clear efforts to meet the diversity of programming needs, they articulated that this was an ongoing challenge.

Challenges: Creating Age-Inclusive, Anti-Ageist Marketing for Targeted Older-Adult Programs

Another reported challenge related to developing older-adult programming was considering how to frame and market this programming. Within the environmental scan, we found that 23 of the 40 library systems offered and marketed programs as being for "older adults", while the remaining 17 did not differentiate between adult and older-adult programs. Although all participating librarians indicated that they believed programming for older adults is valuable, they differed on whether programming should be marketed as being for "older adults" explicitly. For example, an interviewee described how the label of "older adult" could be a deterrent: "We rebranded it. It used to be called the Senior Series and we rebranded it to the Speaker Series. We were hoping to entice the 55 plus crew, even though it's the same age, but we were finding that the older adults don't feel like they're seniors, so we tried to tackle that" (Program Development Manager, Central).

Another noted that they avoided the label of "older adult" when marketing programming because they wanted to avoid "...putting people in a box" (Services Supervisor, Central). This idea was underscored by another interviewee who described how age categories

for adult programming can be a barrier to participation: "It was a 20-something trivia and we had some older people who have said, 'Why couldn't we be included?'" (Community Outreach Supervisor, Central). These librarians therefore avoided the older adult label to ensure that their programs were inclusive of all library patrons regardless of age. Others emphasized that they avoid labelling programs as "older adult", because of the ageist connotations associated with "being old":

I've talked a lot with our older-adult community over the years and what they have told me is, "We don't want to see something that says it's seniors programming or older-adult programming. I only think of myself as older when I look in the mirror" (Services Director, Central).

Of course, the younger seniors don't like to be called seniors, because there's a stigma with that, so we never advertise programs as "Oh. Senior Book Club" or something like that because it's kind of disrespectful, but it would be targeted to that age group simply by having it during the afternoon because, you know, typically other people are working (Program Development Manager, Central).

The notion that many librarians choose to design programs for older adults but do not label them as such may explain the small percentage of explicit, segregated "older-adult specific programming" uncovered in the environmental scan (78/691).

In contrast, others described how they embraced the "older-adult label" as a way of creating a distinct space for this demographic: "I think it's really important to distinguish ourselves from just all ages programs or adult programs, as much as sometimes seniors don't want to recognize that they are seniors. I think it's still really important to do really specific 55 plus programming and have spaces that are specifically for people who are 55 plus" (Community Programmer, Western).

Interviewees chose to categorize programs as being for older adults because they saw it as a way of honouring the uniqueness of later life: "They are a very, very unique group and I think it's a demographic that requires their own programming" (Adult Services Librarian, Central). Another articulated that having discrete and specific older-adult programming was important because of the often-marginalized status of this demographic: "Seniors don't always want to be doing programs with other age groups. They're a group of people that often feel really marginalized and left out in society and I think that's why it's really, really important to do targeted programming that specifically focuses on their needs. Their needs can be very different from other populations as well" (Community Programmer, Western).

A clear theme within the data was, therefore, the tension around labelling and marketing programs that are popular among or target older adults in a manner that

is age inclusive. Labelling programs therefore required librarians to navigate whether to risk deterring older adults from programs with “the older-adult label” in favor of creating spaces that honor the uniqueness of later life, and vice versa.

Promising Practices: Bridging Social Divisions

Light refreshments as a social lubricant

All interviewees indicated a commitment to fostering welcoming and inclusive environments for older adults during programs. The majority of programs uncovered in the environmental scan could be understood as creating opportunities for socializing. These programs, offered at all libraries, included book clubs, writing groups, English as a Second Language learning opportunities, knitting circles, and movie showings. Common programs that provide opportunities for developing a social connection also included painting nights, craft afternoons, audio or podcast clubs, and fitness classes.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of light refreshments, such as tea and cookies, in creating a social environment where diverse groups of people or strangers can come together. When describing the most popular programs among older adults, a program developer asserted that, “A social time with coffee just amongst their peers seem to be pretty popular” (Adult Services Coordinator, Central). The capacity for light refreshments to contribute to an environment conducive to social connection was captured when a participant noted: “I have a drop-in crafts room, so if you have problems with your knitting, we’ll help you fix them. Or just if people want to come in and knit and have a cup of tea or coffee, hang out. And it’s given people a chance to get to know new people. It’s been pretty quiet. There’s never been a ton of people, but the people who come really enjoy it” (Services Director, Central).

When describing how they tried to create a welcoming environment for all community members, another interviewee referred to the capacity for refreshments to start to bridge social divisions: “We feel like we’re running a coffee house sometimes instead of a library because we’re always putting the coffee pot on. That’s another thing too. Sometimes people are hungry, and it’s a good way if somebody isn’t doing so well financially, they can come and have a little snack. No one would ever say anything one way or the other because we provide snacks at our programs, coffee and tea and that sort of thing as they socialize” (Head Librarian, Atlantic).

Combining light refreshments with a social activity represented a low-effort and low-cost practice used to intentionally foster a socially inclusive and welcoming space.

Intergenerational programs

Offering more programs that encourage people from different age demographics to interact with each other represented another practice for bridging age-related social divisions. Although the environmental scan indicated that this type of program happens infrequently, it appeared to be something that the participating librarians wanted to do more of in the future: “I would like to, going forward, to do more intergenerational programming, I think the Repair Café is going to teach us a lot about that” (Program Director, Central). This weekly program consists of having older-adult volunteers teach youth how to repair small appliances. An interviewee perceived intergenerational programming as a means of combatting ageism: “I believe intergenerational programming helps with the younger generation learning compassion and empathy” (Services Supervisor, Central). Other interviewees similarly described how intergenerational programming can benefit both older adults and their younger counterparts by creating mutual understandings between various age groups.

...we’ve heard feedback from seniors saying that they wanted more intergenerational programming, not necessarily with their own families, but just to have a chance to talk to younger people and share their stories with them (Community Engagement Librarian, Central).

We’ve noticed there are a lot of families that are single moms or single dads, and so they don’t have the network that other families might have. So it’s really good for them to have that opportunity to have some older adults (Head Librarian, Atlantic).

The participating librarians thus viewed intergenerational programming as a means of engaging older adults in a manner that they found meaningful, facilitating intergenerational understanding and relationships, and shedding light on the skill sets, capacities, and knowledge of older adults.

Digital literacy

In addition to programs that foster inclusive and welcoming social environments via light refreshments and intergenerational programs, interviewees valued programming that served the purpose of improving digital literacy among older adults. When discussing the importance of digital literacy, or the ability to use and understand technologies, interviewees discussed how programming can be a knowledge resource for older adults: “I sincerely believe that if you don’t have a level of digital literacy, you can’t participate fully in the 21st century” (Program Director, Central). Another interviewee offered a similar sentiment; “we are really looking at the digital learning piece as being most crucial to addressing the needs of seniors who are lost without that digital knowledge” (Senior Services

Specialist, Central). Environmental scan observations aligned with the notion that public librarians appear to value digital literacy as an important resource for older adults. We discovered that all included library systems offered this type of program. The library is very much a space that deliberately supports older adults by teaching skills that are relevant to community participation and everyday life.

Promising Practices: Enhancing Programming

Community partners

Interviewees all noted that they drew on the expertise and resources of community organizations external to the library, staff training, and the perspectives of older adults who use the library to strategically develop programs that older adults would find meaningful. Interviewees sought out community partners to ensure that they are developing targeted programs that are not redundant to other services and programs offered in their communities; “Instead of working alone on things, who’s the major player doing this? And let’s try to work with them to have a greater impact but then also let’s try to help others reduce overlap” (Program Developer, Central). Other interviewees echoed this sentiment when stating, “We try to figure out what is happening in the city and fill the gaps” (Community Outreach Librarian, Western) and when explaining how duplicating community services “wouldn’t be a good use of our funds” (Community Outreach Supervisor, Central). Interviewees thus leveraged community partnerships to determine programming needs.

With the in-kind contributions of community partners, the interviewees also noted that they could increase the number of quality programs that they offer. An interviewee emphasized this by saying, “So when you’re looking at the shared number programs that are offered for seniors, the reason we are able to do that is through our partners” (Senior Services Director, Central). Community partners provided expertise, knowledge, and resources to offer robust programs in a manner that extended and complemented those of librarians. When planning to offer dementia-friendly programming, an interviewee pointed out that “in order to fulfill the need, we would probably need to partner with an organization” (Programs and Services Manager, Central). A community programmer from Western Canada also noted that they partnered with local community organizations to offer “Mandarin or Cantonese language talks” or to provide translation services.

The environmental scan clearly depicted the extensive use of community partnerships to advance or give direction to programming. The majority of informational sessions, such as those on health and well-being, citizenship and immigration, personal finances,

genealogy, culture, Canadian history, and hobbies were offered in partnership with an external organization, such as the Alzheimer’s Society, community centres, writers’ guilds, health clinics, cultural groups, and professional associations, such as the Canadian Council for the Blind. Libraries located near a large university, such as libraries in Calgary, Halifax, Hamilton, London, Toronto, Vancouver, Vancouver Island, and Vaughan, offered informational sessions led by university researchers. Likewise, libraries offered many skill-based workshops, such as those related to filing taxes or navigating legal issues, in partnership with non-profit organizations. Through their partnerships, they were able to identify community needs and service gaps, and in many cases, pool resources to offer more robust programming.

Staff training

In addition to partnerships, interviewees also described staff training as something that can enhance older-adult library programming by inspiring compassion, bringing forth innovative programming ideas, and equipping staff to respond appropriately when serving people with diverse needs. As one participating librarian observed, training “...helps to open up people’s eyes and gives them more compassion and the tools to work with people” (Program Developer, Central). Similarly, interviewees also observed ways in which staff training has responded to contemporary social issues within their patron populations. For example, an interviewee noted that “...libraries have had more issues with drug use and overdoses and so we’ve directed a lot of our staff training to that” (Community Outreach Supervisor, Central). Another mentioned different foci for staff training: “...we need to focus on [diversity training], and I think mental health issues for seniors” (Program Director, Central). Across the board, the interviewees highly valued staff training as a way of developing effective programs.

Direct engagement with older adults

The participating librarians lastly foregrounded direct engagement with older adults as a vital step when developing, executing, and evaluating programs. This was exemplified in an interviewee’s description of how programming is developed within their library system: “Instead of going to the senior home, for example, and bringing the library and bringing books, one librarian goes to the senior’s home, finds out, or any other place I guess, their neighborhood, house. So, the librarian goes to the senior’s place and spends those two hours with seniors with no agenda, just hanging out with the seniors” (Community Outreach Librarian, Western).

By directly engaging with older adults, librarians sought to learn about the interests of older adults, which in turn

led to program ideas. These program ideas acted as a foundation for program development. Interviewees underscored this point when noting "...customers will actually tell us what they are interested in" (Adult Services Librarian, Central), and "...you see regulars and you start to talk to them about their interests" (Program Developer, Central). As one example, an interviewee described how a conversation with a library patron after an informational session about online financial security led them to develop a new program about online dating later in life: "We had a really good conversation about, 'How do people connect with people now?' And obviously all the challenges of that when your husband passes away when you're 60, and lots of your friends are still married. How do you meet people, right? So I think that people were interested in ... with security being part of it, but how do you do it?" (Community Engagement Manager, Central).

Two other interviewees described how older-adult advisory groups informed the process of program development: "It was kind of modeled after our teen advisory group, which is to get direct feedback from teens about what they would like to see in the library" (Community Outreach Supervisor, Central). A program director in Central Canada described their senior advisory group as "a key component of [their] success."

Interviewees also articulated how they sought out the perspectives of their older patrons to evaluate the success of a program. Five interviewees described using Project Outcome, an evaluation tool created by the American Library Association that supports evaluators in gathering both quantitative and qualitative measures. An interviewee described Project Outcome as being helpful because of its ability to "give individuals attending the program the opportunity to provide feedback in terms of what they got back from the program or what they are looking for in terms of future programming" (Community Engagement Director, Central). Likewise, libraries can use Project Outcome to better understand "how [programs] have improved people's lives" (Services Supervisor, Central). Eight interviewees also noted that anecdotal feedback from older adults who participate in library programming helped to inform their program evaluations. "We meet a couple of times a year, so library staff, volunteers, and staff not just in my group but also our Finance and Business Services group, to look at the evaluation forms and the demographic data and the anecdotal feedback to make decisions about next steps" (Program and Services Manager, Central).

Another public librarian evaluated programs with a survey developed in consultation with an older-adult advisory group: "So we also are actually having an older-adult programming survey that we're doing this fall. We've

spent time with the advisory group and staff team" (Community Outreach Supervisor, Central). Evaluating older-adult programs using the perspectives of older adults helped public librarians to refine programs.

Although older adults are involved in the development and evaluation of programs, the programs themselves can be a means of eliciting older adults' voices. As depicted in the environmental scan and by an interviewee, one popular program entails hosting discussions around news media items with older adults. Another library created volunteer positions, where older adults "...basically take charge" of programming for their age demographic (Services Supervisor, Central). Involving older adults in the development, execution, and evaluation of programs was viewed across the board as an important practice.

Discussion

This thematic analysis and environmental scan culminated in a description of the challenges experienced, and the promising practices enacted by Canadian public librarians. We consider here how the identified challenges can be addressed with government support and the sharing of knowledge among library stakeholders. We also explore the potential for public libraries to support and respond to the needs of an aging population. The themes related to "promising practices" provide insight into how public libraries are striving to address challenges and facilitate opportunities associated with aging; namely, those associated with ageism and social isolation.

Addressing Challenges to Older-Adult Library Programming

Although library programming may have the potential to ease both community and individual challenges associated with aging, and can create spaces where the skill sets, knowledge, and perspectives of older adults are valued and enjoyed, the findings indicate that a barrier to older-adult program development is limited staff capacity and limited financial resources (Griffin, Harvey, Gillett, & Andrews, 2019; Hughes, 2017). Irwin and Silk (2019) and Leorke and Wyatt (2019) draw attention to how public libraries often operate in precarious policy environments where they must continually demonstrate their relevance to funding bodies who potentially hold outdated perceptions of libraries as merely "book-lending services". This gap in how libraries contribute to the well-being of their communities and the perceptions of their funders may underlie recent provincial budget cuts to public libraries, such as in Ontario and Alberta 2019. To address the challenge of limited resources, we argue that libraries would benefit from directed federal and provincial government grants.

After examining how improving digital literacy is often a national policy goal, Jaeger, Bertot, Thompson, Katz, and DeCoster, (2012) point out how the financing of public libraries typically originates from local entities. Monetary governmental support for older-adult programs and related staff training can nurture the capacity of libraries to advance federal policy goals, such as those associated with social isolation and digital exclusion. This support may take the form of grants such as the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program grant, which supports the development of programs informed by and designed for older adults. Although we recognize that this is a simplistic solution in times of cutbacks and austerity, direct monetary governmental support could bolster library efforts and encourage innovation in supporting the well-being of older adults and their communities.

Other key challenges related to older-adult programming are meeting the diversity of (and sometimes conflicting) needs within communities, and marketing programs in a way that encourages participation among older adults and that honours the uniqueness and individuality of later life. An avenue to addressing both these challenges and the challenge of limited staff capacity and financial resources would be to strengthen the ability of public-library systems to share resources. This capacity would reduce redundancy in information seeking, program development, and evaluation efforts. As population aging is a phenomenon occurring internationally, Canadian public libraries may also benefit from future research on the practices of older-adult programming in other countries.

A Place for Combatting Ageism

Findings point to how public librarians may have the potential to play an important role in addressing the issue of ageism, or age-related discrimination. Ageism is an ideology that reproduces age-based discrimination and the social exclusion of older adults by generating negative assumptions about later life that are embedded in and perpetuated by everyday discourses and social practices (North & Fiske, 2012). Ageism can intensify challenges associated with aging and encumber efforts to identify and cultivate its advantages, such as the important caregiving and volunteer roles that are often taken on by this demographic (Burnes et al., 2019; North & Fiske, 2012). Likewise, ageism undermines democratic principles by reinforcing the practice of undervaluing or discrediting the voices of certain groups based on identity.

Findings from this thematic analysis showcase how public librarians strive to bridge social divisions. To bridge social divisions, such as those between older and younger adults, the participating librarians sought

to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment and hoped to create more intergenerational programming. These findings align well with the notion that libraries are social spaces that can bring together people from a diverse range of social, economic, and cultural groups (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Vårheim, 2007). Intergenerational programs, older-adult-led programs, and programs that disseminate knowledge about aging may be important in facilitating the development of a culture that is inclusive of older adults. Creating opportunities for older adults to use their skills and share knowledge in public spaces via library programming may represent a means of empowering older adults and dissolving misconceptions about aging. By fostering relationships among different age groups, Alcock, Camic, Barker, Haridi, and Raven (2011) and Burnes et al. (2019) depict how community intergenerational programs can be an effective means of promoting meaningful intergenerational relationships that equip individuals to detect and resist ageist assumptions.

The thematic analysis also highlighted how public librarians navigate tension around how to market programs to an older audience. Some of the participating librarians suggested that the "older adult" label may deter potential library users because of age-related stigmas and the idea that many library users in the program's target audience may not see themselves as "old". This tension may lead librarians to consider and question personal and societal understandings of old age. In an ethnographic exploration of older-adult digital literacy programs in senior centres and public libraries, Lenstra (2017) found that undetected ageism can undermine program effectiveness. Because of their role in marketing programs targeted to an older audience, public librarians may be in a prime position to identify and potentially challenge taken-for-granted ideas in their work about aging.

A Challenge to the Issue of Social Isolation among Older Adults

Social isolation among older adults is an issue thoroughly discussed in literature. To premise their research on the perspectives and experiences of social isolation among older adults, Neves, Sanders, and Kokanović (2019) draw attention to how the Australian, Canadian, and British governments have all made addressing social isolation among older adults a policy priority. Social isolation is a phenomenon associated with negative mental and physical health conditions that occur when individuals become disconnected within their social networks (Weldrick & Grenier, 2018). By developing programs that foster digital and other literacy skills and that create welcoming and inclusive environments where individuals from various ages, cultures, religions, and socio-economic situations can come together for light

refreshments and an activity, public librarians can play a role in mitigating social isolation.

The interviewees' commitment to being inclusive and equipping older adults with skills necessary for social participation aligns with the notion that the public library is "a third place". These places connect individuals with other people, ideas, and opportunities that they would otherwise not encounter (Houghton, Foth, & Miller, 2013). Oldenburg (1999), who coined this term, uses it to describe a place that is neither one's home nor a place of work. In their narrative research on the relationship between social isolation among older adults and a library-based writing library program, Griffin et al. (2019) affirm the notion that libraries are "third places". These places may be especially important in combatting social isolation in that they open up the possibility of expanding one's social network.

Weldrick and Grenier (2018) also posit that social isolation in later life can be rooted in experiences of social exclusion and inequality throughout the life course. A principle of the librarian profession is to promote social inclusion and serve all members of society (Jaeger et al., 2015). Interviewees clearly described practices to support them in mitigating social inequalities by empowering and equipping library users with knowledge, skills, and resources. As noted by Hargittai et al. (2018) and Lee and Kim (2019), a key means by which public libraries support the well-being of older adults and their communities is by empowering older adults with the knowledge and skills to partake in online activity.

Research has shown that many older adults are digitally excluded if they are unable to use the Internet and other technologies because of lack of access and/or skill (Matthews, Nazroo, & Marshall, 2019). Being digitally excluded can put these individuals and groups at a social disadvantage in participating in their communities, finding employment, accessing information, and maintaining social connections with family, friends, and colleagues (Jaeger et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2019). As technology can support older adults in maintaining social connections, the social distancing mandates brought on by COVID-19 may put older adults who are digitally excluded at further risk of social isolation (Armitage & Nellums, 2020). By offering programs that equip and empower older adults, public librarians may be key players in preventing social isolation among older adults.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's limitations present opportunities for future research. A key limitation is that findings are not generalizable to all public libraries. The majority of

participants (72%) were from Ontario, with only 11 per cent being from Atlantic Canada, 16 per cent being from Western Canada, and none being from Quebec. This study is also characterized by a high non-response rate; 18 of the 40 libraries did not respond to our initial e-mail invite and 4 libraries indicated non-interest. Likewise, as data were gathered from large urban library systems that resembled our community partner, the practices and challenges related to program development identified here may not apply to smaller rural libraries that face different challenges and serve a different (although also aging) population (Hughes, 2017).

Findings are also ungeneralizable because of limitations in the environmental scan. The public Web sites of public libraries may only show a portion of their active and retrospective programming. Likewise, the environmental scan only provides a point-in-time perspective on the programming offered to older adults. Although we included programs offered from January to August 2018, the scan does not provide insight into programs offered between September and December 2018. This limitation was only partially mitigated in the second stage of the research, in which, during interviews, participants were given an opportunity to discuss and elaborate on programs that may or may not have been uncovered during the scan.

Furthermore, the environmental scan only documented the programming that older adults might attend in public libraries (courses, activities, events, and organized social groups) and therefore did not provide insight into other public-library services that they might find valuable. Future research is therefore needed to explore how public libraries support the well-being of older adults via collections, outreach services to bring collection items to library users with limited mobility, volunteer opportunities, and physical spaces, and how these services are experienced by this demographic. As noted by Rothbauer and Dalmer (2018), reading among older adults can have several positive social and health outcomes. Understanding how public libraries can facilitate this practice via their collections may be an important area of future research. Likewise, research is needed to understand how public librarians have adapted programming and services for older adults in light of COVID-19 building closures and social distancing mandates.

In addition to being ungeneralizable, this study also relies on the perspectives of individuals who are located and influenced by their social and cultural contexts. The participants' accounts of promising practices and challenges related to older-adult library programming may be coloured by cultural assumptions about older adults. For example, interviewees often relied on age categories, such as 55+ or the "baby

boomers” to describe the target demographic. Assumptions about aging and older adults that shape programming may be a barrier that prevents this demographic from participating. Research is needed to deconstruct these assumptions and their potential implications for library patrons. Likewise, research that elicits the perspectives and experiences of older adults directly is absolutely crucial both in determining whether the practices depicted here are beneficial for this population, and in understanding the implications of cultural assumptions about age.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how public libraries are responding to the needs of an aging population. Using a thematic analysis of the perspectives of public librarians interested in the field of older-adult programming and an environmental scan of program descriptions on public-library Web sites, this study explored the promising practices and challenges related to older-adult program development in Canadian public libraries. Because of the efforts of public librarians to foster inclusive and welcoming spaces, public libraries may hold potential as a means of developing a more age-inclusive and socially connected society. We argue that there is scope for researchers, federal and provincial governments, and public libraries to collaborate in creatively addressing challenges to program development. A first step to nurturing the policy and community development capacity of public libraries would be to foster an appreciation of older-adult public-library programming among relevant stakeholders.

References

- Aabø, S., & Audunson, R. (2012). Use of library space and the library as place. *Library & Information Science Research*, 34(2), 138–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2011.06.002>.
- Aabø, S., Audunson, R., & Vårheim, A. (2010). How do public libraries function as meeting places? *Library & Information Science Research*, 32(1), 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2009.07.008>.
- Alcock, C. L., Camic, P. M., Barker, C., Haridi, C., & Raven, R. (2011). Intergenerational practice in the community: A focused ethnographic evaluation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 21(5), 419–432. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1084>.
- Allen, B., & Wilkinson, M. A. (1990). What do our “senior citizens” want from public libraries? *Canadian Library Journal*, 47(2), 105–110.
- Armitage, R., & Nellums, L. B. (2020). COVID-19 and the consequences of isolating the elderly. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(5), e256. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30061-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30061-X)
- Audunson, R., Aabø, S., Blomgren, R., Hobohm, H., Jochumsen, H., Khosrowjerdi, M., et al. (2019). Public libraries as public sphere institutions. *Journal of Documentation*, 75(6), 1396–1415. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2019-0015>.
- Bennett-Kapusniak, R. (2013). Older adults and the public library: The impact of the boomer generation. *Public Library Quarterly*, 32(3), 204–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2013.818814>.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Burnes, D., Sheppard, C., Henderson Jr, C. R., Wassel, M., Cope, R., Barber, C., et al. (2019). Interventions to reduce ageism against older adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(8), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305123>.
- Buschman, J. (2003). *Dismantling the public sphere: Situating and sustaining librarianship in the age of the new public philosophy*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Canadian Urban Library Council. (2020). About. Retrieved 18 May 2020 from <http://www.culc.ca/about/>
- Dalmer, N. K. (2017). Mind the gap: Towards the integration of critical gerontology in public library praxis. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 1(1), 1–23. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/fimspub/136/>.
- Decker, E. (2010). Baby boomers and the United States public library system. *Library Hi Tech*, 28(4), 605–616. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07378831011096268>.
- Gorry, A., Gorry, D., & Slavov, S. N. (2018). Does retirement improve health and life satisfaction? *Health Economics*, 27(12), 2067–2086. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3821>.
- Graham, P., Evitts, T., & Thomas-MacLean, R. (2008). Environmental scans: How useful are they for primary care research? *Canadian Family Physician*, 54(7), 1022–1023. <https://www.cfp.ca/content/cfp/54/7/1022.full.pdf>.
- Griffin, M., Harvey, K., Gillett, J., & Andrews, G. (2019). Writing as/about leisure: Connecting with oneself and others through creative practice. *Leisure Sciences*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2019.1694609>.
- Hargittai, E., Piper, A. M., & Morris, M. R. (2018). From internet access to internet skills: Digital inequality among older adults. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 18(34), 881–890. <https://doi.org/10.1007/Fs10209-018-0617-5>.
- Horton, J. (2019). Senior citizens in the twenty-first-century public library. *Public Library Quarterly*, 38(2), 179–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2018.1554176>.
- Houghton, K., Foth, M., & Miller, E. (2013). The continuing relevance of the library as a third place for users and non-users of IT: The case of Canada bay. *Australian Library Journal*, 62(1), 27–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2013.7717641>.

- Hughes, C. (2017). Rural libraries services for older adults: A nationwide survey. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1275626>.
- Irwin, B., & Silk, K. (2019). Changing stakeholder expectations of library value. *Public Library Quarterly*, 38(3), 320–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1571398>.
- Jaeger, P. T., Bertot, J. C., Thompson, K. M., Katz, S. M., & DeCoster, E. J. (2012). The intersection of public policy and public access: Digital divides, digital literacy, digital inclusion, and public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 31(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2012.654728>.
- Jaeger, P. T., Taylor, N. G., & Gorham, U. (2015). *Libraries, human rights, and social justice: Enabling access and promoting inclusion*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Johnson, C. A. (2010). Do public libraries contribute to social capital? A preliminary investigation into the relationship. *Library & Information Science Research*, 32(2), 147–155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2009.12.006>.
- Johnson, C. A., & Griffis, M. R. (2009). A place where everybody knows your name? Investigating the relationship between public libraries and social capital. *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, 33(3–4), 159–191.
- Joseph, M. (2009). Public library strategies for the over 50s: Everything old is new again-or is it? *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 22(3), 115–119.
- Kleiman, A. M. (2012). “Boomer-ize” your library collection: The basics. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 52(2), 102–105. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/refusersq.52.2.102>.
- Larsen, P. V. (2013). Environmental scanning. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of public relations* (Vol. 1, pp. 303–304). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lee, O. E., & Kim, D. (2019). Bridging the digital divide for older adults via intergenerational mentor-up. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 29(7), 786–795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731518810798>.
- Lenstra, N. (2017). Agency and ageism in the community-based technology support services used by older adults. *First Monday*, 22(8). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i8.7559>.
- Leorke, D., & Wyatt, D. (2019). *Public libraries in the smart city*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matthews, K., Nazroo, J., & Marshall, A. (2019). Digital inclusion in later life: Cohort changes in internet use over a ten-year period in England. *Aging and Society*, 39(9), 1914–1932. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X18000326>.
- Minkler, M. (2005). Community-based research partnerships: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Urban Health*, 82(2), 2–12. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jurban/jti034>.
- Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (2011). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Morgan, A. U., Dupuis, R., D’Alonzo, B., Johnson, A., Graves, A., Brooks, K. L., et al. (2016). Beyond books: Public libraries as partners for population health. *Health Affairs*, 35(11), 2030–2036. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0724>.
- Neves, B. B., Sanders, A., & Kokanović, R. (2019). “It’s the worst bloody feeling in the world”: Experiences of loneliness and social isolation among older people living in care homes. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 49, 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2019.100785>.
- North, M. S., & Fiske, S. T. (2012). An inconvenienced youth? Ageism and its potential intergenerational roots. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(5), 982–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027843>.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community* (2nd ed.). New York: Marlowe & Company.
- Oliphant, T. (2014). “I’m a library hugger!”: Public libraries as valued community assets. *Public Library Quarterly*, 33(4), 348–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2014.970431>.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rothbauer, P., & Dalmer, N. (2018). Reading as a lifeline among aging readers: Findings from a qualitative interview study with older adults. *Library & Information Science Research*, 40(3–4), 165–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2018.08.001>.
- Rubenstein, E. L. (2016). Health information and health literacy: Public library practices, challenges, and opportunities. *Public Library Quarterly*, 35(1), 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.2015.1450520100140>.
- Sabo, R. M. (2017). Lifelong learning and library programming for third agers. *Library Review*, 66(1/2), 39–48. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LR-08-2016-0065>.
- Stephoe, A., de Oliveira, C., Demakakos, P., & Zaninotto, P. (2014). Enjoyment of life and declining physical function at older ages: A longitudinal cohort study. *CMAJ*, 186(4), 150–156. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24446463>
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.
- Vårheim, A. (2007). Social capital and public libraries: The need for research. *Library & Information Science Research*, 29(3), 416–428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2007.04.009>.
- Weldrick, R., & Grenier, A. (2018). Social isolation in later life: Extending the conversation. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 37(1), 76–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S071498081700054X>.