Older Adults' Experiences of Community in Municipal Recreation Contexts: A Case Study of
the Burlington Seniors' Centre

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In 2012, the first members of the baby boom cohort, those born between the years of 1946 and 1965, reached the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 2012). The older adult population in Canada is expected to outnumber that of youth and adults and will compromise majority of the population in 2036. As the Canadian population continues to age, organizations and services need to provide adequate and appropriate social programs to alleviate feelings of social isolation (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011). Seniors' centres provide recreation and social activities tailored to older adults, as well as opportunities to volunteer and socialize. Although widely available, the extent to which older adults use seniors' centres, relative to other community organizations to meet social needs is unknown. Also, there is little research on the provision of recreation programs in seniors' centres by municipal parks and recreation departments.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand how the Burlington Seniors' Centre build community for its older adult participants. Data was collected through document analysis of seven promotional materials, policies and procedures manuals, twelve semi-structured interviews with recreation practitioners and older adult participants, and observations of eight recreation programs.

Recreation practitioners discussed culture change at the seniors' centre to change perceptions of older adults, and structuring program experiences when developing recreation programs. Older adults valued developing new social connections, improving skills while aging, and experiencing a sense of community with recreation program and volunteer groups. Important insights emerge from this study, namely how older adults can cultivate significant relationships and improve skills in positive and inclusive atmospheres. However, this can be accomplished based on organizational capacities in the recreation department, including number of rooms available for programming, instructors and collaborations with community organizations. Future research areas include the role power plays in seniors' centre contexts, improving opportunities to alleviate social isolation and combating images of ageist attitudes for baby boomers who perceive seniors' centres as a place for the frail elderly.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Understanding the recreation experiences of older adults is important and more research may contribute to the quality of these experiences. Furthermore, the older adult population is increasing. According to Statistics Canada (2012), adults aged 65 years or older account for 13% of the Canadian population. By 2036, it is expected that one in five people will be over the age of 65 (Statistics Canada, 2012). As the baby boomer and older adult populations continue to age, social services and contexts such as community centres, recreation programs, and volunteer opportunities will play a large role in providing important resources and experiences for older adults. As such, researchers and practitioners must continue to make inclusive age-friendly programs and communities. Hutchinson and Gallant (2016) stress the importance of exploring the experiences of older adults, specifically in seniors' centres.

I chose the context of a seniors' centre for this study because of its role in providing informal social activities for older adults (Chang, Wray, & Lin, 2014). Aday, Kehoe, and Farney (2006) argue that it is important for older adults to have a place where they can engage socially with one another, as this can work to combat isolation. Further research demonstrates that social connections have positive impacts on the lives of older adults, including physical and psychological well-being in recreation contexts (Chang, Wray, & Lin, 2014; Bryant, Brown, Cognan, Dallaire et al., 2004; Paillard-Borg, Wang, Winblad, & Fratiglioni, 2009; Dupuis & Smale, 1995).

Seniors' centres have increasingly spread throughout Canada, in response to the aging population, primarily in urban communities with more centres. Recreation programs and volunteer positions are the main opportunities offered at Canadian seniors' centres. While

recreation programs are offered at different levels and go by many names, I selected the term "recreation programs" to promote clarity. Participation at seniors' centres exposes older adults to skill development in an inclusive group environment, informal friendships that transcend the program and volunteer spaces and social support. Hence, recreation programs and volunteer opportunities provide an interesting way to understand how community is built at a municipally-run seniors' centre.

1.1 Arriving at my Research Purpose

Personally, my connection with seniors' centres runs deep. I have spent the past 6 years in undergraduate and graduate programs learning about and studying the potential contribution of recreation and leisure to individuals and groups. I now see my philosophy as advocating for meaningful leisure experiences. Throughout my undergraduate degree at Brock University, I learned about community recreation issues and was exposed to different practical experiences. I had the privilege of working with the Adults 55+ Team for the City of Burlington Parks and Recreation Department. Based out of the Burlington Seniors' Centre, I worked as a Recreation Services Program Development Intern, working specifically on the development of sports programs. This internship was my first experience of working with an older adult population. In the first year of master's coursework, I took a 'Leisure and Community' class that reminded me of the potential for leisure. Throughout the semester, the class talked at length about the role of leisure in building relationships among community members; the foundational piece for fostering a sense of belonging in a community. Applying this knowledge to a seniors' centre context, I wondered how community was built through recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Throughout this study, my personal experiences in seniors' centres informed every aspect of this work. Moreover, a discussion of how this process unfolded (e.g. reflexive journaling) is provided

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throughout this thesis. This document is more than a thesis. It is, in part, a reflection of my growing understanding of seniors' centres, and its potential future contributions in the lives of older adults.

1.2 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis contains eight chapters. In Chapter One, the project is introduced and positioned as a significant topic to study. In Chapter Two, I provide a comprehensive review of relevant literature is then presented to identify research gaps in need of exploration. In Chapter Three, I address the epistemological assumptions of constructivism and discuss the theoretical application of interpretivism. I also outline the three-phase research design process used to understand how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Examining relevant documents including promotional materials and policies was the first phase of research. After analyzing the documents, I conducted individual interviews with recreation practitioners and older adult participants. The final phase of the research involved observations of recreation programs. In Chapter Four, I introduce the case examined in the study: the Burlington Seniors' Centre and present the findings from document analysis. I present my findings in two thematic chapters, Chapter Five: Building Community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and Chapter Six: Experiencing Community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. In Chapter Seven, contributions to our understanding of seniors' centre experiences, organizational capacity, and conceptualizations of community are outlined. In Chapter Eight, I conclude the thesis with closing remarks including a discussion of the implications of the study, recommendations for practitioners, and areas for future research.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Aging may present a set of challenges for older adults including isolation, exclusion, marginalization, and health-related issues. Toepel (2013) argues that most public policy debates are concerned with the physical issues of aging, while social issues including isolation tend to be ignored. Social isolation is an objective absence of contacts and interactions between an older person and their social network, characterized by a lack of social contacts and inadequate or unreliable relationships (Cattan, White, Bond, & Learmouth, 2005, p. 43). Older adults are more prone to social isolation due to life course transitions such as retirement and living alone (Cornwell & Waite, 2009; Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016). Social isolation may have serious consequences for older adults including a greater risk for loneliness, depression, lack of community participation and connections with others (Aday, Kehoe, & Farney, 2006; Silverstein & Parker, 2002; Keefe, Andrew, Fancey, & Hall, 2006). With the fear of re-establishing personal relationships and the difficulty of creating new friendship after a significant life transition (e.g. retirement), older adults may struggle to find a sense of meaning and community (Paillard-Borg et al., 2009). However, places like seniors' centres allow for older adults to build bonds with others in their age demographic in a comfortable and supportive atmosphere, and in turn heighten one's sense of resiliency.

A limited number of studies focus on seniors' centres and their provision of recreation programs by municipal parks and recreation departments (Strobl, Maier, Ludyga, Mielck, & Grill, 2016). According to Weiss (1995), seniors' centres provide older adults with a place that offers opportunities for support, empowerment and knowledge. There remains a need to develop a better understanding of how seniors' centres act as places where community is built. First, examining the recreation program and volunteer experiences of older adults provide insights into

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why individuals get involved in and experience these opportunities. These insights may be applied to improving existing recreation programs and developing new ones to meet the diverse needs of older adults. The developmental considerations (e.g. recreation program planning) presented in this thesis enrich our understanding of how practitioners attempt to build community experiences for participants. Although these findings are seniors' centre specific, they provide information that can be transferred to similar contexts.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants.

Three research questions guided this study.

1. How do older adult program participants, volunteers and recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

2. What meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre

3. What role (if any) does community building play in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

An examination of the literature related to the growing population of older adults is presented in this chapter, specifically addressing who these individuals are and the aging process that they are experiencing. The community building literature is also explored to examine the concepts of community engagement, community attachment, and sense of community. I then provide context to the study by detailing municipal recreation service provision, organizational capacity in municipal recreation contexts. Lastly, I speak specifically to seniors' centres, outlining offered services and programs, and detailing participants. This chapter concludes by demonstrating the link of this literature reviewed to the purpose of this study and specific research questions.

2.1 Older Adults

2.1.1 Aging Population

Increasingly large groups of people are aging and a better understanding of the impact on individuals and communities is worthy of attention. Population aging refers to a decline in the proportion of youth and an increase in the percentage of the population of those aged 65 years and older (Satariano, 2006). Presently, older adults comprise a larger segment of the population than at any other time in history (United Nations, 2013). The older adult population in Canada is expected to outnumber that of youth and adults over the next decade. By 2036, it is expected that one in five people will be over the age of 65 (World Health Organization, 2014; Health Canada, 2002). The implications for this change in population demographics are significant for Canadian policy and organizations, as is discussed further in this chapter.

2.1.2 Who is Old?

Within the literature, a constant debate exists over the age in which an individual is considered an "older adult". The World Health Organization (1998) states that there is no specific age for when an individual becomes "old", but the age has been set at 65 years because that is when people tend to retire. Statistics Canada (2012) also defines older adults as individuals aged 65 years and older, whereas the City of Burlington (2017) characterizes older adults as those aged 55 years and older. It is important to recognize that chronological age is not a precise definition for aging. The World Health Organization (1998) recognizes that there are diverse variations in health status, participation, and levels of independence for older adults, and it is important to be aware of other factors that affect the aging process.

Understanding the factors that contribute to the conservation of function as individuals age has recently become a popular area of research (Harahousou, 2007). This focus emphasizes aging well, which the World Health Organization (1948) describes as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease". Successful aging and active aging have also been discussed in the literature. Rowe and Kahn (1997) popularized the idea of "successful aging" which describes engagement in life, high cognitive and physical function, and low disease and disability. These terms of "successful" and "active" exclude some older adults based on their functional capability, particularly around cognitive and physical function, and those who live with disease and disabilities. Looking at the literature that questions the nature of aging is relevant to my research because elements of this debate may be reflected in the programming and policy context of seniors' centres. How community building is conceptualized in the literature is discussed next.

2.2 Community

Community is clearly a relevant construct given the context of this study. Within the interdisciplinary field of recreation and leisure studies, research has focused on the relationship between leisure and community. Community has been described in a number of ways; as the informal networks that exist between people, between groups, and between organizations (Gilchrist, 2004); as a group of people who are different yet united by a common goal (Glover & Stewart, 2006); and as places, social structures, and a sense of connection with others (Crow & Allan, 1995). Glover and Stewart (2006) explained that "community is especially relevant for leisure studies. Building a community and forging social webs are at the very core of leisure provision, participation, and the traditions of leisure research" (p. 325).

Leisure researchers have encouraged a change in perspective of community from an individualistic view as a geographical and spatially limited area (Arai & Pedlar, 2003), to community as a group of people who share a common interest (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Glover and Stewart (2006) argue that leisure researchers need to be aware of the contested nature of community, by being critical of how community manifests itself in leisure contexts. Mair (2006) suggests that leisure researchers should think critically about and improve their efforts to advance community-based approaches. This means that researchers must acknowledge all types of communities including communities of place and socially constructed forms of community.

This thesis explored how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. Focusing on the subjective meanings that older adults associate with their seniors' centre experiences, this study relies on conceptualizations of community attachment and sense of community, as described later in this chapter. Moreover, the success and sustainability of recreation programs can be enhanced when they originate, and are guided by, community

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needs and wants (Giles & Lynch, 2012). However, it is challenging for recreation programs to be derived from a community when there is relatively little published or documented knowledge regarding what constitutes 'community' for older adults. Therefore, in this study, it was important to understand what role (if any) community building plays in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. In this study, community building was acknowledged as the creation or enhancement of community among older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. One way that community is built is having community members engaged in decision-making processes, as is described in the next section.

2.2.1 Community Engagement

Community engagement occurs when community members are engaged to work and learn together on behalf of their communities. Community building often focuses on encouraging people to be actively involved in their community, and community engagement is a way of accomplishing this. The City of Burlington used community engagement to achieve their goals, specifically with the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan. The Burlington Active Aging Plan used five community engagement strategies, that are outlined below:

1) *Surveys* – reaching community partners and groups who serve older adults,

2) *Community Forums* – table discussions with peer and professional facilitators who gathered feedback on key themes of the project,

3) *Community Working Group* – working group members represented seniors' organizations and included citizens who could speak to the "lived" experiences of older adults,

4) *Council Input* – individual discussions with council members to document neighbourhood strengths and needs, and to highlight the interests and concerns of older adults, and

5) *City Staff Working Group* – city staff identified and prioritized new projects that improve the city's strategies to becoming an age-friendly community.

The key pillars identified from these community engagement stages will be outlined in more detail later in this chapter and described in the document analysis chapter. Having multiple methods of community engagement allows diverse perspectives to be brought to planning initiatives, and community members to engage with one another when they might not have had previously.

Understanding community engagement is important to the recreation planning process, because if there is no engagement, assumptions may be made about the recreation programs offered, which may be completely contrary to what the participants want (Leone, Barnes, & Sharpe, 2015). The participation of older adults in the development of recreation programs can enhance community building, as they are included in decision-making processes. As described later in this chapter, applying an older adult perspective to the recreation program design process allows community members to have their opinions valued and ideas incorporated.

Arnstein's (1969) "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" theorises eight levels of community engagement, separated into three types, which can contribute to community building in the case of a municipally-run seniors' centre. The stages of *non-participation* fall at the bottom of Arnstein's ladder, where community members play a minimal (if any) role in community participation.

Degrees of tokenism refers to the increasing level of community engagement, where citizens have a voice, but those in power have control in if there is follow through to these opinions. In a municipal recreation context, one cannot infer that attendance and participation at a community centre indicates community building and support for how recreation services are offered (Potwarka, Havitz, & Glover). These authors found that at a 'traditional centre', meeting the needs of participants are determined by the professional judgement of city employees who staff the centre. Surveys are often used as community engagement strategies. However, surveys are not valid forms of community engagement when used without other input from community members. Arnstein (1969) argues that those in power (i.e. recreation practitioners in this case) can pick and choose issues to address, limiting community concerns (i.e. older adults in this case) from being taken into account.

Degrees of citizen power sits at the top of the ladder, where community members are viewed as equals and have full say in participation. This type of participation can also take the form of a partnership or co-management between municipalities in the development of recreation programs. Community engagement in the development of recreation programs and other decision-making processes represent one way that community is built in the context of a municipally-run seniors' centre. Subjective feelings of community explained through community attachment is described next.

2.2.2 Place and Community Attachment

The built environment of a "community of place", including recreation facilities, is often meaningful for older adults and can have implications for the identity they construct for themselves and their community (Christensen & Levinson, 2003). Tuan (1974) discussed this relationship in terms of place attachment, described as being comprised of members having

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affective ties with the community's material environment. Omoto (2005) supported Tuan's notion by stating that sharing time and experiences at certain events or facilities within the community can help to invoke a sense of connectedness for community members. These types of emotional ties contribute to the development of community building (Long & Perkins, 2007). Place attachment was evident in the findings of this study, as the recreation facility of the Burlington Seniors' Centre contributed to older adults shared experiences in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities.

Similar to place attachment is the concept of community attachment, described as the extent and pattern of social participation and integration into a community (Brown, Xu, Barfield, & King, 2000). This concept consists of two different categories: "rooted in place" and "an indicator of social change". Community attachment described as "rooted in place" refers to a person's sense of belonging in a group, creating a sense of loyalty to that group. Two indicators of this are age and the length of time in a group (Brown et al., 2000). Brown et el. (2000) found that individuals become attached to others through their recreation program and volunteer participation, more specifically, after more time is spent together in these contexts.

When describing "indicators of social change", Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) describe community attachment as being reflected through the length of time in a group and other emotional elements. According to Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), these emotional elements include friendship, formal and informal associations within the local community. Budruk and Wilhem Stanis (2013) argue that recreation spaces have the potential to foster social relationships. Specifically, these authors described how volunteering on the same shift for an extended period of time allowed them to feel attached to the other volunteers. According to Baker and Palmer (2006), as length of time within a community increases, individuals tend to

experience a higher level of community building. In summary, both place attachment and community attachment appear to focus on the emotional bond that older adults feel towards their community of place. As discussed next, subjective feelings of community can also be understood through sense of community.

2.2.3 Sense of Community

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define sense of community as the subjective feeling that individuals have about the strength of attachment for a group of people. These authors refer to four characteristics that shape sense of community including *membership* (boundaries of acceptance), *influence* (conformity and the ability to influence others), *integration and fulfilment of needs* (both personal and group needs), and *shared emotional connection* (personal identification with a group). These characteristics also indicate how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, as will be addressed in the findings chapters.

Traditionally, sense of community has been studied at the geographic and neighbourhood level (Glynn, 1986; Putnam, 2000). According to Zhang, Zhang, Zhou, and Yu (2017), as an individual's length of time in a community increases, so too does their personal sense of community. These authors explained how older adults rely on their neighbours to fulfill their social needs as they are likely to have shrunken social networks and limited social interaction.

However, simply having relationships with friends and neighbours does not automatically translate into having a sense of community (Putnam, 2000; Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001). It is something that is developed over time, through the sharing of collective values and interests (Chaskin et al., 2001). Scholars have claimed that sense of community is not decreasing, but instead smaller, interest-based groups are satisfying the need for community. For example, Dionigi and Lyons (2010) studied an exercise intervention program with older adult

participants to explore aspects of sense of community. These authors found that the exercise program acts as a place where participants experience a shared emotional connection. Additionally, Lyons and Dionigi (2007) sampled older adult participants of the Australian Masters Games. This study found that having a shared sporting interest demonstrates membership and feelings of belonging by becoming members of a local club. The findings from these two studies relate to this thesis. As will be discussed in the findings chapters, participants described how engaging in a recreation program with the same group of people allowed them to get to know one another better, contributing to a shared emotional connection. Similarly, volunteers talked about how they rely on one another to serve the customers at the Bistro, contributing to a fulfillment of needs. Now that there is an overview of the community building literature, I now turn to the context of the study, outlining municipal recreation service provision.

2.3 Municipal Recreation

The intent of municipal recreation services, as related to this study, is to support the creation of strong and viable communities, while contributing to residents' quality of life (Community Recreation Policy, 1987). Broadly speaking, the current context of municipal recreation provision is the withdrawal of government funding, and a philosophy that encourages public-private partnerships (Syfert, 2003). Supporting what the community wants, determining what fits the vision of the city and department, and looking at what is manageable with existing resources and sustainable in the long-term are critical elements that need to be considered and examined in municipal recreation service provision (Searle & Brayley, 1993). The following discussion will highlight forces that shape municipal recreation service provision, contributing to the community building capacity of a recreation department.

2.3.1 Forces Shaping Municipal Recreation Service Provision

It is important to recognize the role that government has played and continues to play in the provision of leisure services. According to Henderson et al. (2001), the public has generally supported the view that all government entities should provide basic opportunities for recreation activities to every member of the community (p. 17). Some of the commonly accepted rationales used to justify government involvement in the delivery of recreation services include:

> Governments have the financial resources to acquire, establish, improve and operate facilities; government provides a source of continuity and permanency; and legal precedent has been set over the years (Henderson et al., 2001, p. 181).

This discussion of government involvement in the provision of recreation services is relevant as my study looked at how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. The policies and procedures that affect recreation service provision will be described in more detail in the next chapter to better understand what role (if any) community plays in recreation programming.

Today, government resources are tight, and it is expected that the government do more with less, yet communities want to maintain existing levels of service. As a result, municipalities are looking at partnerships and other collaborative ways of operating to build community. Syfert (2003) stated that "partnerships are a means for a local government's elected officials and employees, the private sector's workforce, non-profit agencies, and the public to come together for the good of the community" (p. 9). Partnerships can give municipalities access to additional financial resources, access to more customers, and new recreation program ideas (Harrison, 2005). The role that partnerships and collaboration played in community building will be addressed in the findings' and discussion chapters.

The demographic group that the municipal recreation department is serving is also an important consideration for recreation practitioners. For this thesis, the older adult population was the demographic being studied. Recreation practitioners need to recognize that the older adult population is diverse in many ways including, but not limited to "abilities, generational attitudes, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and cultural backgrounds" (Halton Region, 2015, p. 14). Linking back to the previous discussion of who is old, it is also important to understand that people age at different rates depending on their personal circumstance, meaning that numeric age constraints are inappropriate (Hislop, 2010). The Halton Region (2015) describes an older adult perspective as "a shared understanding of concerns and factors that can influence an older adult's quality of life and is based on the values and priorities that older adults have identified as important to them" (p. 6). Applying an older adult perspective in the municipal context of this study was evident in the document analysis chapters as promotional materials featured ordinary people doing ordinary things.

By valuing the diversity of older adults in terms of culture and ability, this can surely be reflected in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Rich and Giles (2015) explain how part of accepting ethnic and cultural diversity involves understanding problematic characteristics of organizational cultures. These authors focus on the concept of cultural safety, "an approach that requires the participant to determine whether in fact she or he has received a service that was offered in a respectful and culturally sound manner" (Rich & Giles, 2015, p. 315). Rich and Giles (2015) acknowledge that some organizations and their programs are lacking in cultural diversity. Partnerships and working relationships with cultural organizations can help with this issue as will be discussed in the findings chapters. Being able to adapt recreation programs and

volunteer experiences to the needs of older adults is a way to personalize their experiences, allowing them to feel more connected to their community.

Establishing organizational cultures that are supportive of inclusion and accommodation can better support older adults in their recreation program and volunteer experiences. Before diverse programming is offered, steps need to be taken to ensure that inclusion can be achieved for diverse populations and health status. For example, Roth (2015) argues how the involvement of people from diverse backgrounds in development, implementation and evaluation of programs could contribute to improved inclusion techniques (e.g. appropriate modifications). Outreach and communication can also be improved to promote the diverse programming by including information in Braille, large print, and images that are equally representative of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Roth, 2015). Sensitivity training for diverse program staff can allow practitioners to address cultural diversity in seniors' centres. These ideas will be explored further in the findings chapters. The discussion now turns to the age-friendly movement and how this affects practices in a municipal recreation context for an aging population.

2.3.2 Age-Friendly Movement

To accommodate the growing aging population, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) released a "Policy Framework on Active Aging" that recognizes how older adults can face increasing challenges as they age. Communities and organizations need to address these challenges in order to provide supportive environments for the aging population, through the development of an age-friendly city. The WHO defines an age-friendly city as a "social and physical environment that is guided by policies, services, and structures in a community, collectively assisting older adults to actively age" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2012). Similarly, the Ministry of Seniors Affairs describes age-friendly communities as "anticipating

and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences; and promoting the social participation of older adults, encouraging their contributions to all aspects of community life" (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 8).

Eight domains of a city's age-friendliness are outlined below:

1. Civic Participation and Employment,

2. Communication and Information,

3. Community Support and Health Services,

4. Housing,

5. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings,

6. Respect and Social Inclusion,

7. Social Participation, and

8. Transportation.

In 2017, the City of Burlington established the Burlington Active Aging Plan in consultation with local residents, businesses, community groups, city staff, leadership team, and council members. During this time, the task force reviewed current initiatives, as well as best practices implemented in North America, and developed a vision for Age-Friendly Burlington. The Age-Friendly Burlington vision statement is "Burlington is a caring and age-friendly city where citizens enjoy healthy, active lives and feel safe, connected, and valued as they reach their full potential" (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 18).

The task force developed strategies to achieve this vision under five focus areas, which were adapted from the original eight domains of a city's age friendliness.

1. Transportation and Transit,

2. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings,

3. Social Inclusion,

4. Civic Participation, and

5. Communications and Information.

To understand how community was built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, this thesis analyzed the Burlington Active Aging Plan in the document analysis chapter. This document will be described in further detail in the thesis, describing how the plan shapes the development of promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals.

2.3.3 Municipal Recreation Planning

Leone, Barnes, and Sharpe (2015) found that four decision points ultimately impact the implementation of a municipal recreation plan: community engagement (how are community members involved), plan scope (important for plan to fit within capacity of the recreation department), collaborations (with other internal departments), and council and resident support (need to balance the needs of city councillors with needs of community members). Berke, Backhurst, Day, Ericksen, Laurian, Crawford, and Dixon (2006) suggest that there is a continuous need to understand how the recreation planning process will work and how each stakeholder's voice can be incorporated. This is often achieved through the form of stakeholder and community engagement processes, which was addressed earlier in this chapter. Hiring new program instructors and having them involved in lesson planning allows instructors to develop relationships with the practitioners to provide socialising opportunities for program participants. Formalized recreation programming, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, also allowed for consistent program experiences for older adults.

Healey (2003) recognizes the critique that collaborative planning aims to "neutralize" power instead of embracing the struggle between governing and non-governing agents. Huxley

and Yiftachel (2000) build further on the issues of under-representation of power dynamics in collaborative planning. These authors discuss how context plays a large role in collaboration as there are guiding laws and policies that influence local social and cultural practices. Formalized recreation programming, as discussed by recreation practitioners, has underlying power implications. This will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

2.3.3 Municipal Recreation Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity refers to the ability of an organization to attract and deploy various resources to fulfill goals (Hall et al., 2003; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Sharpe, 2006). For this study, these goals include micro-level, such as a recreation program or service, and at the macro-level, such as the implementation of a governmental strategic plan, as seen with the Burlington Active Aging Plan. Organizational capacity plays a large role in how community is built in a municipal recreation context.

According to Hall et al. (2003), organizational capacity is divided into three capacity dimensions: financial capacity, human resources capacity, and structural capacity. Structural capacity can be further divided into relationship and network capacity, planning and development capacity, as well as infrastructure and process capacity.

Financial capacity is the ability of an organization to develop financial capital (e.g. revenues, expenses, assets) (Hall et al., 2003). Funding is one of the largest challenges for a municipal recreation department, because they are not a priority in the eyes of council (Kaczynski, Havitz, & McCarville, 2005). If there are not enough people registered for a municipal recreation program, practitioners often have to cancel programs so that they are not losing a lot of money (Kaczynski, Havitz, & McCarville, 2005).

Human resources capacity involves an organization's ability to use human capital (e.g. paid staff and volunteers), and the skills that these individuals possess (Hall et al., 2003). Both recreation program instructors and volunteers played a large role in how community was built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Relationship and network capacity involve the capacity of developing relationships with various stakeholders (Hall et al., 2003). For municipalities, relationships are often formed with community partners to create new recreation programs and networking with other municipalities contributes to new program ideas. Hall et al. (2003) describes infrastructure capacity as the ability of organizations to engage with various forms of processes. Lastly, planning and development capacity compromises an organization's ability to develop and draw on organizational documents. Both promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals are addressed in the document analysis chapter. The extent to which organizational capacity influences how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre is addressed in the discussion section of this thesis. Context will now be given to this study by describing seniors' centres.

2.4 Seniors' Centres

According to the Older Adults American Act, the role of seniors' centres is to act as a focal point for older adults aged 60 years and older to receive a variety of programs and services (Wick, 2012). Seniors' centres exemplify the increasing role that human service, community-based organizations play in the overall continuum of care for older adults (O'Hanlon & Copic, 2007). Successful seniors' centres not only promote the health and well-being of older adults by offering a diversity of program and service options but do so while engaging them in the community (Pardasani & Thompson, 2010).

Recently, there has been a debate on whether seniors' centres should focus on the needs of older adults or consider the needs of the broader community in their service provision. Pardasani (2010) stated that fostering the development of community hubs and rethinking age-segregated programming is seen as being a productive solution to the stigma faced by older adults and limited funding for a municipal recreation department. As described earlier in this chapter, given the increasing heterogeneity of the older adult population, recreation programs and volunteer opportunities must respond to diverse needs and expectations. Having intergenerational programming would group the participants together regardless of their age and needs (e.g. 30 year old's and 80 year old's). Malonebeach and Langeland (2011) argue that seniors' centres are a context to prevent the social exclusion of older adults and avoid simplified programming to a wide age-range of participants. My research focused on the Burlington Seniors' Centre which is a community centre that houses recreation programs and volunteer opportunities for adults aged 55+. The case will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Participation is the key to success of any service organization, including municipally-run seniors' centres. Fitzpatrick and McCabe (2008) argue that seniors' centres remain a place where older adults can experience education, socialization, and empowerment. Studies conducted on the benefits of participation at seniors' centres found that older adults maintain independence through retirement and foster close friendships (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). Leisure activities have been illustrated to provide social support for older adults (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007), but there has been limited attention given to seniors' centres as a place where social support occurs. Hutchinson and Gallant (2016) suggest that there is a need to continuously explore community environments that support aging in place, such as a seniors' centre. The findings chapters will highlight the recreation program and volunteer experiences of older adults.

Research suggests that the use of seniors' centres is largely by individuals aged 70 years and older (Aday, Kehoe, & Farney, 2006). Turner (2004) explains that individuals who fall within the Baby Boomer generation perceive seniors' centres as a place for the "frail elderly". Baby Boomers view themselves as energetic individuals who will not age until very later in life (Fitzpatrick & McCabe, 2008). Ageist stereotypes from Baby Boomers have convinced some seniors' centres to shy away from using the term "seniors' centres" to identify themselves (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012).

2.4.1 Programs and Services at Seniors' Centres

Recent research indicates that there has been a growth in the diversity of programs and services provided by seniors' centres. Pardasani and Thompson (2012) studied how seniors' centres promote participation among older adults, identifying five approaches:

1) *Community Centres* – provide recreation, art and culture, education, and intergenerational programs to all ages; programs are publicly funded and supported by memberships;

2) *Wellness Centres* – provide health and wellness, meals, arts and culture, and recreation to adults age 50+; funded through membership fees;

3) *Lifelong Learning/Arts Centres* – provide education, travel, culture, and performing arts events to adults aged 50+; funded through membership fees;

4) *Entrepreneurial Centres* – provide vocational training and placement, hand-crafted goods for sale, recreation, arts and culture, fitness, meals, and education to adults age 50+; funded through fundraising and other income-generating events;

5) *Café Program* – provide café-style meals (breakfast and/or lunch), health information, and entertainment to adults age 50+; funded through participant fees and fundraising.

These models were found to attract younger older adults who desired recreation programming to support physical and mental wellness (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). The Burlington Seniors' Centre offers both programs and services that relate to these models. Opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre include, but are not limited to, discussion groups, day trips, fitness programs, social events. These opportunities will be described in more detail when discussing the participant observations in the next chapter and in the findings chapters.

2.4.2 Formalized Recreation Programs at Seniors' Centres

There is an increased interest in looking at new ways of delivering leisure services to communities. Burke (1995) talked about some reasons as being that government is perceived as being less efficient than private businesses, and the public is angry with government over the tax burden (p. 11). Henderson et al. (2001) suggested that leisure service organizations should move away from a direct service provision model and adopt a new model of service delivery where recreation practitioners "work side-by-side with constituents to plan, implement, and evaluate programs". This service delivery model allows recreation practitioners to become facilitators and educators of recreation opportunities and experiences, thus becoming an 'experience facilitator' rather than simply an 'activity provider' (Parr & Lashua, 2004).

In order to change how leisure services are provided, Henderson stated that two forms of effective leadership are needed: (1) professional leadership that gives direction to techniques and program strategies, and (2) community member involvement that gives the program validity (p. 379). Participants in Huxley's (2003) study on collaboration with community members stated that in the past, practitioners have created a relationship with participants where they are dependent on the practitioners to provide recreation opportunities. This creates a "us" (practitioners) vs. "them" (older adults) versus one where participants work in collaboration with

practitioners to create opportunities for themselves. The power implication as a result of this dynamic will be explored in more detail in the findings chapters. Formalized recreation programs will be described in more detail in the recreation practitioners' findings chapter. Volunteer opportunities are present at several seniors' centres, which will be described in more detail next.

2.4.3 Volunteering at Seniors' Centres

The literature on volunteering is extensive including but not limited to categories of motivations to volunteer, volunteer organizations, and volunteering as a civic responsibility. Given the extensive literature, I will limit review of the volunteer literature as it relates to this study; older adults volunteering, more specifically, volunteering at a seniors' centre. Retirement presents a transition in an older adult's life as they may be exiting paid employment which may have been their primary life focus for a number of years (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011). This transition could contribute to feelings of disconnection from important social networks, and loss of purpose or focus (Lancee & Radl, 2012). The transition to retirement presents opportunities as well, including increased levels of time to engage in voluntary activity, and high levels of expertise to contribute to organizations (Kleiber & Nimrod, 2009; Morrow-Howell, 2007).

Vezina and Crompton (2012) define formal volunteering as any unpaid help provided to schools, religious organizations, sports or community associations (p. 38). Formal volunteering is explored through this study, focusing on those individuals who give their time regularly without expectation of financial return to community organizations, and do so for personal motivations beyond financial gain. Formal volunteering has participant typologies which address how the individual has engaged with volunteering over the life course. "Lifelong" volunteers are those individuals who demonstrate a pattern of consistent volunteering throughout major life events and transitions (Smith & Gay, 2005). There are also individuals who do not have any life

course commitment to volunteering, but a significant life transition leads them to seek out volunteer opportunities, defined as "trigger" volunteers (Smith & Gay, 2005). The findings chapters will illustrate how older adults come to be involved in volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, and their personal motivations to volunteer.

Organizations (i.e. seniors' centres) are concerned with the retention of volunteers (e.g. satisfaction) and recruitment of volunteers (e.g. engagement). Institutional facilitation of the volunteer process involves an organization's ability to retain, develop, train, and utilize older adult volunteers within formal volunteer spaces (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009). Encouraging continuity in roles and volunteer spaces to encourage older adults to participate involves organizations encouraging continual volunteering through life changes and maintaining satisfaction from older adult volunteers (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009). The findings section of my thesis focuses on how organizations encourage older adults involvement in volunteer roles at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, and the satisfaction that older adults get from their roles.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Through this literature review, I outlined past research regarding the growing population of older adults, community building, municipal recreation service provision/organizational capacity, and seniors' centres. Various research gaps were identified including the need for more studies of municipally-run seniors' centres as a place where social support occurs, and an in-depth understanding of how older adults experience recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. In an effort to build upon this literature, a qualitative case study methodology was used to examine how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. By using multiple research methods, I uncover the rich, multi-layered experiences

of older adult participants and recreation practitioners who are involved at the Burlington

Seniors' Centre. The contributions this study makes to existing research are outlined in the

subsequent chapters. Next, I present how the study was conducted in Chapter 3 – Research

Process.

Chapter 3: Research Process

3.0 Introduction

A qualitative study methodology situated within a constructivist paradigm approach provides the applicable tools to gain an in-depth understanding of how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. This chapter will begin with an overview of the conceptual framework that shapes this research, detailing ontological and epistemological alignments. The multiple research methods used to collect data are outlined below, in addition to the approach to data collection and analysis. Ethical, reflexive, and dissemination considerations are also presented in this chapter. Overall, the reader is provided with a clear understanding of how the thematic findings and their implications were arrived at.

3.1 Philosophical Framework

How we understand our world is shaped by fundamental questions of ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodology (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Researchers make ontological claims about how things are, epistemological claims about how we know, leading to theoretical decisions that ultimately inform methodology (Berbary & Boles, 2014; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). These beliefs guide how a researcher interprets the social world and directs the research approach of a study.

By selecting a qualitative approach, I chose to conduct this research within an overarching relativist-constructivist-interpretivist framework, focusing on subjective and contextual experiences of individuals. Ontologically, this research was situated within relativism. Relativism acknowledges the existence of multiple interpretations, allowing researchers to understand that one experience may be different when compared to others, but all experiences are considered legitimate (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Lee, 2012). Philosophers state that

knowledge is relative to certain reference frames or social contexts (Pernecy, 2016, p. 104). Epistemologically, this research was situated within constructivism. Constructivism argues that meanings are constructed as people engage with the world around them from their situated social and historical perspective (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism is consistent with relativism as it "seeks to explain how human beings interpret or construct knowledge in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 37).

The onto-epistemological framework has led to the theoretical perspective of interpretivism. According to Schwandt (2015), interpretivism aims to produce meaning and seeks to understand an individual's perception of a contextually-based situation. Interpretivism allows the researcher to grasp the subjective experiences that individuals have attached to their actions and behaviours within specific contexts (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009; Schwandt, 2015). Denzin (2001) states that "meaningful interpretation of human experience can only come from those who have thoroughly immersed themselves in the phenomena they wish to interpret and understand" (p. 46). The researcher must observe study participants as well as the setting of their social interactions. Moreover, interpretivism recognizes that the researcher's own historical, cultural, and social contexts affect their interpretations (Crotty, 1998). In interpretivist inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument in both data collection and analysis. Specific data collection and analysis methods will be detailed in the methodology chapter. Next, I will outline the purpose statement and research questions of this study.

3.2 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants. Through exploring one municipally-run seniors' centre, the experiences were investigated from three perspectives: (1)

how older adult participants and recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, (2) meanings associated with participation at the seniors' centre, and (3) role of community in recreation programming. These perspectives fostered a rich, multi-layered understanding of this seniors' centre. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do older adult participants, volunteers and recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

2. What meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

3. What role (if any) does community building play in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

3.3 Qualitative Case Study Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology that fits within a constructivist paradigm. The use of qualitative research methods within a case study methodology enables the researcher to collect rich, multi-layered insights into the lived experiences of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). Qualitative researchers often focus on the participants' lived experiences by communicating their stories through diverse mediums (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative, constructivist approaches are becoming increasingly relevant for understanding older adults' leisure participation (Dionigi & Lyons, 2010; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007). Moreover, as Johnson and Parry (2015) argue, qualitative researchers strive to capture the essences and contexts of people's experiences by "recognizing the interactions between people and the socio-historical worlds in which they exist" (p. 163). This qualitative approach enabled the unpacking of multilayered experiences and contexts that influence the case in this thesis. A qualitative case study that fits within a constructivist paradigm

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allowed me to delve deeply into the case (i.e. Burlington Seniors' Centre) and to understand the lived experiences within (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

By focusing on the complexities within cases, qualitative case study researchers strive to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationships that people experience (Stake, 2005). Yin (2009) described cross-case analysis as an analytic technique to unearth rich insights by comparing two or more cases. Rather than directly comparing the perspectives of both recreation practitioners and older adults, I investigated these concurrently to capture an in-depth understanding of (1) how community is built by older adults and recreation practitioners, (2) meanings associated with participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities, and (3) development of recreation programs.

Qualitative case study researchers also explore "bounded systems" within real-life contexts (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). An advantage of using a qualitative case study approach involves the researcher studying an organization in its natural context (Yin, 2009). Qualitative case study researchers spend large amounts of time in the field to immerse themselves in the surroundings that they are exploring. I spent many hours observing recreation programs and the interactions that participants were having. Described in more depth below, I conducted interviews with recreation practitioners and older adult participants, so that they could reflect on their personal experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. This depth of analysis led to uncovering multiple realities and complexities with the seniors' centre and community building experiences of study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Defining "the case" is the main consideration for qualitative case study researchers (Stake, 1995). Thomas (2011) made an important distinction between the subject and object in case study research. The subject in any research refers to the case itself, while the object

represents the analytical frame "through which the subject is viewed and which the subject explicates" (Thomas, 2011, p. 511). Simply put, both the subject and object must be identified to make the research a case "of" something (Thomas, 2011). In this case, the object is how community is built for older adult participants, and the Burlington Seniors' Centre is the subject.

3.4 Introducing the Burlington Seniors' Centre

The focus of this research was to understand how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. To address the purpose of this study, the research site had to meet certain criteria. These criteria were: (1) a municipality with direct provision of recreation programs, as opposed to collaboration; (2) the presence of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities; and (3) the provision of a centralized seniors' centre. These criteria are important to the purpose of the study as it allowed me to select a municipality that was solely responsible for the provision of recreation programs and volunteering for older adults. Based on these criteria, the Burlington Seniors' Centre in the City of Burlington was selected as the case at the centre of this thesis research.

The City of Burlington is situated on the western shore of Lake Ontario, forming the west end of the Greater Toronto Area, with its neighbour, the City of Hamilton. The City of Burlington is also located in the Regional Municipality of Halton. Burlington is characterized by the Niagara Escarpment, Burlington Bay, and Lake Ontario shorelines (City of Burlington, 2017). According to Halton Region (2011), the number of older adults will double to 127,000 by 2031. Within the Halton Region, the City of Burlington is expected to see the largest increase of older adults compared to other municipalities (Statistics Canada, 2012). This was another reason that the City of Burlington was the focus of this study. With an anticipated increase in the older adult population, it was vital for municipalities such as Burlington to increase the availability of

resources to help encourage social participation and decrease social isolation as people age.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of growth forecasted by age group in the City of Burlington.
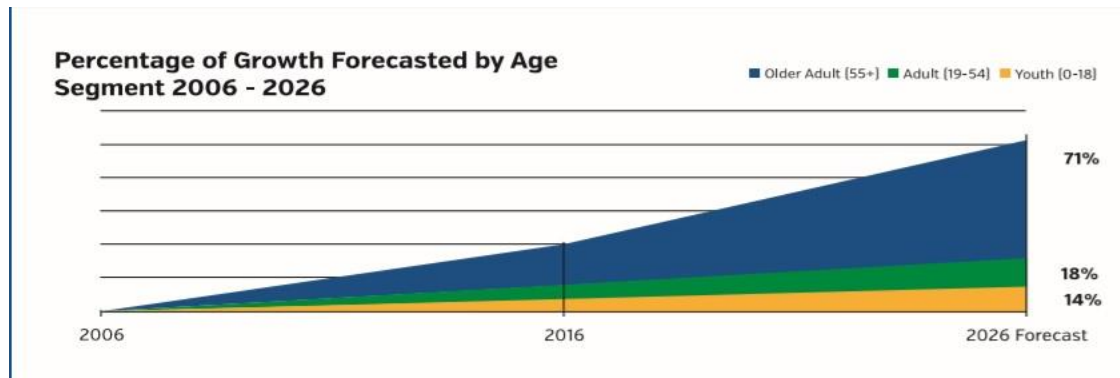
Figure 1: Percentage Growth in Burlington (City of Burlington, 2017)

In response to the aging population, the City of Burlington is also involved in a movement to help keep older adults active, healthy and engaged in their community. This goal to become an Age-Friendly-community, a notion that was discussed in some depth in the literature review, is described in detail on their website.

> Older adults are an important part of our community fabric. Like many other world-class cities, our goal is to become an "Age-Friendly" community that is truly inclusive, accessible, and supportive of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. A place where residents feel a sense of belonging and have access to opportunities and services that make their life better and richer (City of Burlington, 2017).

> One way of encouraging older adults to be engaged is through community programming.

Located a five-minute drive from the downtown core where City Hall is located, the Burlington Seniors' Centre is one of the facilities that provide programming for the older adult population. The vision for the Adults 55+ community is described as follows.

> Through our city-wide seniors' programming, we strive to enable residents 55 years and older to remain vital, healthy and connected to their community. Staying active, learning new things and being social is key to a healthy lifestyle and vibrant community (City of Burlington, 2017).

The Burlington Seniors' Centre offers approximately 223 recreation programs, both registered and drop-in for Adults 55+ in the City of Burlington. Overseen by the City of Burlington Parks and Recreation Department Adults 55+ Team, these individuals are responsible for the development and implementation of recreation programs for older adult participants. Registered and drop-in recreation programs exist in the forms of recreational/sport (e.g. Pickleball), fitness (e.g. Men's Fit), continual learning (e.g. "If" Discussion Group), games and cards (e.g. Mah Jong) and general interest programs (e.g. Pottery) (City of Burlington, 2017).

Membership is available to adults aged 55+ which is required for registered programs at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and provides discounts to programs that run at other facilities throughout the city (i.e. Brant Hills Community Centre, Tansley Woods Community Centre, and Haber Community Centre). Membership also allows for admission to events and day trips, which are restricted to the Burlington Seniors' Centre members. Recreation fee assistance is also made available to individuals who require it. To qualify for the fee assistance program, the applicant must: be a resident of Burlington and provide proof of residency (e.g. utility bill, driver's license), have a total net individual or combined family income below low income cut off (LICO) and provide official documentation that shows combined family income (e.g. notice of assessment). Newcomers are also eligible to apply for the recreation fee assistance funding within their first year in Burlington. Income verification is not a requirement during this time, but documentation must be provided (e.g. confirmation of permanent residency, proof of residency in Burlington) (City of Burlington, 2017).

For those individuals who choose not to participate in recreation programs, but still want to get involved in some capacity, there are volunteer opportunities available. Volunteering with the City of Burlington provides an opportunity to gain experience, enhance or build skills, and

participate in the community (City of Burlington, 2017). Volunteer positions at the Burlington

Seniors' Centre exist in the forms of kitchen help, events assistant, front desk assistant, and

partners accessing leisure services (PAL). The Burlington Seniors' Centre is a unique case to

study because it is now entirely run by the City of Burlington Parks and Recreation Department,

whereas in the past, programs were created in collaboration with an independent Board of

Directors. The City ended its association with the Burlington Seniors' Centre Inc. (BSCI) in

2015 after a Memorandum of Understanding expired (Whitnell, 2015). The next three sections

will outline more detail of how the Burlington Seniors' Centre was used as the research context

for this study, including a discussion of how I gained access to the centre and recruited

participants.

3.5 Research Design

  Three concentric circles were used to organize this single-case study (Thomas, 2011). I

chose to use concentric circles to illustrate the units of analysis for this study and their relation to

one another. The main "circle" or "core" explored was the Burlington Seniors' Centre as it

provides recreation programs, volunteer opportunities, and other important resources for older

adults. The City of Burlington recreation practitioners were the next "circle" as they are

responsible for the creation and provision of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities.

The older adults were another "circle" for this study as they are the ones participating in

recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. The last concentric circle were the recreation

programs, to understand their structure and the experiences/culture they provide for older adults.

Each of these concentric circles overlap as they are important to the case, but each have their

own component that provides important insights. All of these concentric circles were important

to developing an in-depth understanding of how community is built at the Burlington Seniors'

Centre. Figure 2 illustrates the concentric circle that this research followed.

Figure 2: Concentric Circle

3.6 Recruitment

Recruitment represented a significant process in the study. I progressed from contacting a

gatekeeper at the City of Burlington, to establishing a connection with the Recreation

Coordinator from the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Once gatekeepers were secured, I partnered

with the Burlington Seniors' Centre, and subsequently, recruited study participants. Next, I

outline the steps by which I recruited participants, beginning with contacting the gatekeeper at

the City of Burlington.

3.6.1 Gaining Access to the Burlington Seniors' Centre

As I was writing my thesis proposal document in the spring/summer of 2018, I contacted

the Recreation Supervisor for the Adults 55+ Unit of the City of Burlington. As the City of

Burlington gatekeeper, the Recreation Supervisor identified the Burlington Seniors' Centre as a

potential research site for my study. Specifically, the Recreation Supervisor emphasized the City

of Burlington's development of its Active Aging Plan, stressing the importance of remaining engaged in their community through recreation programs. Moreover, the Recreation Supervisor provided the contact information for the Recreation Coordinator, who was my gatekeeper for the remainder of the study.

After receiving ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics, I contacted the Recreation Coordinator via email, requesting to partner with the Burlington Seniors' Centre for my study, upon which the request was accepted.

At the September 2018 meeting of the Adults 55+ Team (a Recreation Supervisor, two Recreation Coordinators, and a Recreation Programmer), I outlined the purpose of the study, intentions to interview practitioners and program participants, and obtained suggestions of recreation programs that they think would be fit for good observations. After this meeting, the Recreation Supervisor signed the Burlington Seniors' Centre Organization Recruitment letter (attached as Appendix A). In the following sub-section, I detail the recruitment methods.

3.6.2 Recruitment of Participants

The participants for this study were purposefully sampled, drawn from the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The study participants were those who frequent the centre the most: the recreation practitioners and older adult participants. This was also a good case through which to explore broader questions about community centres and building community.

3.6.2.1 Recreation Practitioners

Recreation practitioners were recruited based on their connection to the creation and provision of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. I sent an email to each recreation practitioner outlining the study, its purpose and intended contributions. I had the practitioners' emails from the past work experience as described in the introduction chapter. Practitioners were

invited to participate in in-person interviews at their convenience (see Appendix B1: Recruitment Email for Recreation Practitioners). Four recreation practitioners were interviewed (a Recreation Supervisor, two Recreation Coordinators, and a Recreation Programmer) were interviewed, all of whom work at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The interviews were conducted in the practitioner's offices at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

The recreation practitioners also suggested older adults who might be interested in sitting down for an interview and recreation programs that would be good to observe. By identifying potential participants, the recreation practitioners are constricting voluntary participation. When the gatekeeper encouraged older adults to participate in an interview, this limited the older adults to participate based on their own choice as they may have felt pressured. This is similar to the recreation programs, as the instructor may have felt pressured to allow observation of their programs.

3.6.2.2 Older Adults

Some older adults were recruited from practitioners' suggestions and others were invited to participate in the study based on their engagement in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. At the initial visits to recreation programs, I introduced my study purpose and why I would be observing the programs. Copies of the interview information letters were left with the instructors and included my email address, so the older adults could email if they were interested in participating in the study. Also, those interested in participating in the study were invited to approach me in the recreation programs or contact me via email. I then responded to their email to set up a time for an interview (see Appendix B2 for older adult email script). The interviews were conducted in the Resource Room at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

3.6.2.3 Description of Participants

Describing study participants is important for providing context when presenting the findings. *Pseudonyms* were used to protect their confidentiality. If participants did not have an idea for a pseudonym, I chose names from TV shows that I was watching at the time of analysis (e.g. Outlander and Bob's Burgers). Gender has been included solely for informational purposes and was not used as part of the analysis for this study. *Participant group* indicates whether the participant was a recreation practitioner or an older adult. *Position/involvement* refers to how the participants were engaged at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For recreation practitioners, their position is outlined. For older adults, their involvement in recreation programs or volunteering is detailed. Below is a table that summarizes each participant.

3.6.2.4 Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Participant Group	Position/Involvement
Jamie	Male	Recreation Practitioner	Recreation Coordinator
Ann	Female	Recreation Practitioner	Recreation Coordinator
Ivy	Female	Recreation Practitioner	Recreation Programmer
Claire	Female	Recreation Practitioner	Recreation Supervisor
Louise	Female	Older Adult	Intermediate Line Dancing; various writing groups
Alix	Female	Older Adult	Intermediate Line Dancing
Tina	Female	Older Adult	Instructor for Current Affairs
Treacle	Male	Older Adult	Instructor for History, Music
Barney	Male	Older Adult	Current Affairs
Grace	Female	Older Adult	Volunteer at the Bistro
Brianna	Female	Older Adult	Volunteer at the Bistro
Linda	Female	Older Adult	Volunteer at the Bistro

Table 1: Participant Profile

3.6.3 Role of the Researcher

Johnson and Parry (2015) recognize that the role of the qualitative researcher is to understand the lived experience of participants, as well as to acknowledge what they bring to the context of the study. Throughout the research process, from data collection to analysis and interpretation, I viewed my role as a researcher in different ways. A component of my role as a researcher was to consistently monitor my values and assumptions through self-reflection and reflexive journaling. According to Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), self-reflection is necessary to create an environment of mutuality within the interview. Throughout the research

process, I challenged my previous understandings and assumptions through self-reflection and reflexive journals and observation fieldnotes, which will be described further in the following sections.

My role throughout the interviews with recreation practitioners and older adult participants was that of a discussion facilitator. I created a safe space where participants could speak freely of their experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Hull (2007) suggested active listening through verbal cues (e.g. "hmmm…yeah…right") and non-verbal encouragers like eye contact, nodding and leaning forward. These tactics were used in my interviews with participants, as well as avoiding judgement on responses and using simple language to create a welcoming environment of mutual trust between the participants and myself.

Throughout the observation process, I made sure to situate and introduce myself to the older adults' program participants during my first observation, so they knew why I was there. Observations were a difficult part of the data collection process, as I was not sure how participants would react to my presence in the program. Below is an excerpt from a fieldnote during my first observation in a Beginner Ballroom Line Dancing program.

<div align="center">Ballroom Line Dancing (Beginner)—01/14/2019</div>

> Once all of the participants were on the floor, [head instructor] welcomed us all and asked me to come on the stage and introduce myself. I walked and hopped on the stage which made the participants react in an "ooh" sound and for the head instructor to say "oh, to be young again". While on the stage, I was able to introduce myself, tell them that I was doing a research project on the Burlington Seniors' Centre for my master's degree at the University of Waterloo. I also told the participants to do what they normally do and don't worry about me as I am looking to understand the culture being fostered in the program, but they can approach me if they have specific questions regarding my research.

I was able to introduce myself and explain why I was observing the recreation programs during my first observation, however there were implications with this. For those participants who were not at the first class, the instructors kindly introduced them to me the following week.

<div align="center">41</div>

Also, participants didn't have a say in whether they wanted me to observe the programs that they were involved in. Instructors may have felt pressured to open up their programs for me to observe based on the practitioners suggesting their program for observation. These implications will be further discussed in the findings and discussion chapters.

The purpose of establishing a rapport between researcher and participant is to generate rich data while at the same time ensuring respect is maintained between researcher and participant (Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). Leach (2005) argues that there are signs of growing rapport by increase in flow of conversation, disclosure of sensitive information, and increased eye contact. I was able to build rapport with the participants of each program observed, with my increased time and engagement in conversations. I came to each program for four weeks. During the initial observation of programs, I saw a lot of side eye glances and comments of "you're not a senior". However, with each week, participants began warming up and inviting me into conversations that they were having. These informal conversations also led to the recruitment of some participants for interviews as will be described in the following section.

3.7 Data Collection

As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how community is built for older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Data collection for this study proceeded through three phases, which will be described as follows. Document analysis was selected as the first phase of the research as it shows the recreation and volunteer activities that are promoted at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and policies that support the provision of these activities. Interviews were chosen as the second phase of the research to discuss how policies and procedures affected building community practices (e.g. recreation practitioner interviews) and the experiences of community building (e.g. older adult interviews).

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Observations and reflexive journaling were the last phase of research to take what I had learned in the interviews and see for myself the culture and experiences being fostered in programs. The discussion will now turn to each phase of the research outlining how each were conducted.

3.7.1 Phase One: Document Analysis

Phase one consisted of analyzing promotional materials provided to potential older adult participants, as well as staff policies and procedures manuals. This step was taken as I sought to address research question three: *what role (if any) does community play in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?*

Promotional materials such as the City of Burlington website, Live and Play Guide, and Adults 55+ program booklet were analyzed to understand the recreation programs offered and volunteer opportunities available for older adults. Staff policies and procedures manuals were also analyzed, and these included the City of Burlington Official Plan (2017), the City of Burlington Strategic Plan (2015-2040), the Halton Older Adult Plan (2015-2018), and the Burlington Active Aging Plan (2017). These documents were selected based on their connection to older adults, recreation programming and participation, in addition to the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Yanow (2000) argues that promotional and policy documents can be understood as texts because they are read by various stakeholder groups. She furthers this argument by stating that the meanings derived from texts "are created actively in interactions among three perspectives (p. 17). These perspectives reside in the author's intent, the text itself, and the reader. Interpretative approaches to document analysis focus on the meanings that documents have for a wide range of populations, which is important for those working and participating at a seniors' centre. Produced within a particular social setting, documents are considered to represent a

collective set of social values, which are embedded in the culture of an organization (Prior, 2003). Daly (2007) acknowledges that our interpretive processes are influenced and shaped by the shared meanings we have about activity, language, and cultural symbols. As such, I acknowledged that there are multiple realities constructed by people as they engage with the world they interpret, so, one person may have an entirely different interpretation of the promotional materials text than another person.

Prior (2003) explains how documents have practical and social impacts, which were at the root of my interest in conducting an analysis of promotional materials and policy and procedures manuals related to the Burlington Seniors' Centre. My role as a researcher was to explore the "what" and "how" of these documents (Yanow, 2000). For example, the City of Burlington website describes how staff members "strive to provide experiences for residents 55 years and older that enable them to learn new things, live healthy lifestyles, and remain socially connected." With a researcher lens, I wondered: How so? Can these learning opportunities take place outside of the Burlington Seniors' Centre? Are all staff members actively involved in supporting individuals with these goals and interests? It was in phase one of the research where I began identifying some of the factors that may affect participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre (e.g. language in documents) and would be worthy of further exploration at later stages.

The analysis stage entailed interpretation and theme analysis, involving cycles of analysis that were repeated in whole and in parts (Wood & Kroger, 2000). The promotional materials were analyzed to look for specific language that may attract older adults to participate at the Burlington Seniors' Centre while the policy documents were analyzed to see if this language was reflected in policies and procedures. After reading the documents in their entirety several times, I selected segments of text to analyze. My focus was on analyzing and interpreting the context,

structure, function, and possible consequences within each of the segments of text (Wood & Kroger, 2000). After analyzing segments of text, the next step was to develop themes using the documents as a whole. Progressing through a continuous cycle of analysis and refinement, initial themes regarding the structure of the documents as it relates to the role of community were checked against segments that were previously examined.

Conducting a document analysis in this phase allowed me to reflect on the promotional and policy documents, specifically, the discourse of community used in these documents. Phrases that explicitly used the term *"community"* was one way of doing this, but descriptions of recreation programs allowed older adults to understand what they would get out of their participation so that they could select a program that suits their interests and needs. This information also set the context for understanding the meanings associated with experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and led me to re-frame my interview questions to solicit responses from both recreation practitioners and older adult participants. For instance, the reference of social isolation for older adults was something I discovered when analyzing these documents, and I was able to discuss this in interviews. The process of reflecting between phases and modifying interview questions made it possible to delve more deeply into how community was built for older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

3.7.2 Phase Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

Phase two consisted of semi-structured interviews with both recreation practitioners and older adult participants. This phase was taken to address the first and second research questions: *what meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre;* and *how do older adult program*

participants, volunteers and recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors'

Centre.

The semi-structured interview involves an informal, interactive process using open-ended questions in order to understand meanings, perspectives, and life experiences (Daly, 2007). Corresponding with constructivist epistemology, Manning (1997) describes the researcher as a collaborator in the process of constructing meaning and discovering perspectives within an active interview. This was achieved by allowing the participant to lead the conversation and having a flexible interview guide that encouraged elaboration on important topics (Roulston, 2010). For example, when one participant said, "community is inherent in the program itself", I asked the participant to describe a specific example of when this was evident.

In total, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study. As mentioned previously, all four recreation practitioners (Jamie, Ann, Ivy, and Claire) were interviewed in their offices. These interviews were conducted from December 2018-January 2019 and ranged from 40-70 minutes in length. During the interviews, I asked practitioners about their experiences of developing recreation programs and what role (if any) community plays in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For instance, I asked, "can you take me through the process of how recreation programs are designed and implemented"? Also, "tell me about significant relationships at the centre". I was able to probe around questions that I generated from document analysis (see Appendix C1 for a copy of the recreation practitioner interview guide). For example, analysis of the promotional materials led me to ask the practitioners about maintaining community connections outside of the Burlington Seniors' Centre and city-wide initiatives in programming.

Eight older adults (Louise, Alix, Barney, Tina, Treacle, Grace, Brianna, and Linda) were interviewed in the Resource Room at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These one-to-one interviews were carried out from January-April 2019 and ranged 50-80 minutes in length. These interviews served to delve deeply into the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, yet I also prepared some leading questions that served as an introduction to the interview (see Appendix C2 for a copy of the older adult interview guide). For instance, questions I explored in the interviews included: "how would you describe your personal community (or social support) before coming to the centre"; "how would you describe your relationship with other participants here"? I was also able to pose questions that were generated from document analysis. For example, "tell me about periods of loneliness or social isolation in your life". After the interviews had been conducted, all participants received a feedback letter thanking them for their participation (see Appendix D).

3.7.2.1 Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive journaling represents a process of self-analysis and the opening of one's self to their data (Callaway, 1992). Researchers use reflexive journals to examine "personal assumptions and goals" and clarify "individual belief systems and subjectivities" (Ahern, 1999; Genoe & Leichty, 2016). During this study, I engaged with reflexive journaling by reflecting on how my assumptions influenced and were influenced by all aspects of the research (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). My reflections described what I heard during interviews, what I saw during observations, and how my perspective and assumptions were changing within the research context.

Throughout the interview process, I acknowledged my position and perspective on research as a way to track my assumptions (Finlay, 2000). By first acknowledging my research

position and experiences of working at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, this was a way to see how

my understanding changed throughout the study.

Situating myself-09/12/2018

I am an interpretivist and believe that we understand and make meaning through our lived
experiences and that knowledge is created through interactions. By asking older adults
about their experiences in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities, I can gain
insight into their experiences at a seniors' centre.

Practical background-04/16/2017

In the summer of 2017, I worked for the Adults 55+ Team within the City of Burlington
Parks and Recreation Department. Based out of the Burlington Seniors' Centre, I worked
as the Recreation Services Program Development Intern, focusing on the development of
sports programs for Adults 55+.

Following every interview and program observation, I wrote in my research journal about

how I felt about what I experienced and how it shaped my understanding of the topic. For

example, with the questions that I asked during interviews, some participants reflected back to

their childhood. At first, I was worried because this was not related to the research purpose, but I

was grateful that individuals were comfortable in sharing those stories with me. Below is a

journal entry from an interview with Alix, where she shared her childhood experience of the

Blitz.

Interview with Alix-01/16/2019

I felt comfortable speaking with Alix and learned a lot about her personal life. When
asked about her social support outside of the centre, Alix explained how she grew up in
the United Kingdom and her "unusual childhood". When Alix was 5 years old, the Blitz
bombs were happening, so her siblings had to hide in an Anderson shelter every night
after dinner. One night Alix's mom was waiting for her dad to get home while she and
her siblings were already in the Anderson shelter and a bomb went off near their house.
Both parents were tragically killed in this bombing. Although this was not related to the
research topic, I felt that it was important for Alix to feel comfortable and where she
could talk about how this experience shaped relationships for her as she grew up. I was
also grateful that Alix felt comfortable in sharing this tragedy with me.

I also continuously made links to previous experiences, many of which I reflected upon in previous entries. This process enhanced my depth of analysis throughout the data collection and analysis process by challenging myself to think critically and unpack my evolving assumptions. This discussion will be taken up in more detail later in this chapter.

3.7.3 Phase Three: Observations

Phase three consisted of observations in various recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. This phase was taken to address the second research question: *what meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.* Also, observations were used to understand the culture fostered in the recreation programs. For this study, eight programs were selected for participant observations: Beginner Ballroom Line Dancing, Intermediate Ballroom Line Dancing, Chair Yoga, Culture of Food, "If" Discussion Group, Men's Fit, Pickleball, and Pottery.

An observer becomes immersed in what they are studying to gain an understanding of the meanings that participants put upon events and situations within their social world (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2012). Throughout my time in these recreation programs, I logged approximately 48 hours of observation time. During this process, I maintained mental notes of the interactions between instructors and participants, how individuals engaged in programs, and how my presence influenced the experiences of participants (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). Immediately after leaving each program, I recorded mental observations as reflexive fieldnotes in my research journal, capturing what I observed to inform and shape data collection and analysis processes (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). An excerpt from a field note involving the observations of the Men's Fit class is included below.

After attending two sessions, I have a pretty clear idea of what the Men's Fit class looks like. To begin, the men trickle into the Port Nelson Room between 12:00 and 12:30 pm. It seems like social groups are forming when people gravitate to each other and engage in conversations, mostly catching up from the past week. Some individuals also engage in a stretch/warm-up while they chat. The class begins with the instructor sharing announcements, which typically involve re-introducing me to the class (to which is important for those individuals who may not have been present in past weeks) as well as the instructor's updates on apartment hunting. Next, everyone spreads out and faces the back window where the instructor leads us through a warm-up. The warm-up consists of stepping to the beat of the music, leg lifts, and steps to the side, to get our heart rate up. After a couple of minutes of getting our body warmed up, the instructor had us move around the room, either jogging or having a brisk walk. As I jogged around the room alongside the men, I noticed that a lot of them were having conversations with one another while following the instructor. As I jogged around the room alongside the men, I noticed that a lot of them were talking about when they could expect their t-shirts. As described to me two weeks ago, the participants organize t-shirts that have 'Traci's Tigers' embroidered on the front. Traci explained that the men who have been in the program for years made t-shirts because it allowed them to feel a part of the group. For the new participants, the t-shirts allowed them to feel included.

With this observation, I was able to understand the importance of participants to "feel a part of" the Men's Fit group. The t-shirts symbolized a way for the men to feel that they are a part of the Men's Fit community. Also, the way that the class is structured in terms of warm-up, represents a consistency that I believe is important to this group. Consistency in recreation program content was discussed with recreation practitioners in their interviews.

3.8 Data Analysis

Staying true to qualitative research, I initially embedded myself in the interview transcripts and fieldnotes, repeatedly reading each in their entirety to understand the meaning of the text (van Manen, 1997). Data collected through interviews and participant observations were analyzed using elements of Charmaz's (2006) thematic analysis within Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral.

The data analysis spiral is a construct that embodies the flexible and emergent quality of qualitative research processes by representing analytic circles that researchers move through during a study (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), these spirals consist of four parts of analysis: data managing; reading and memoing; describing, classifying and interpreting; and representing (see Figure 3 for visualization of the data analysis spiral). Within this framework, I applied thematic data analysis to analyze the data from interviews and participant observations. Thematic data analysis focuses on what is said and acknowledges the subjective construction of meanings in participant stories (Charmaz, 2006). What follows is an overview of specific steps of analysis that I carried throughout this study as Bryman, Teevan, and Bell (2009) advocate for presenting a clear and detailed account of the analysis process.
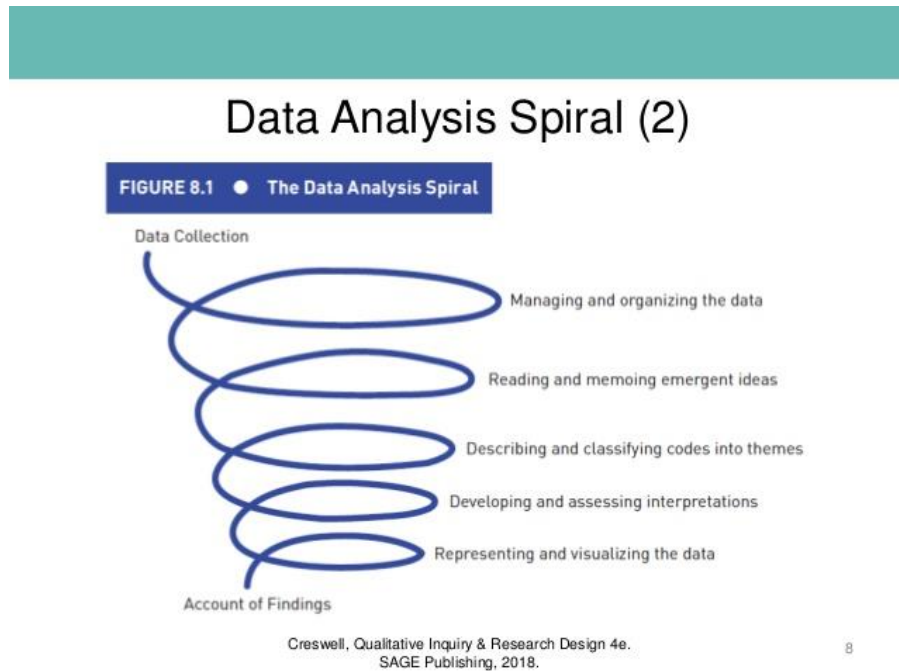
Figure 3: Data Analysis Spiral

3.8.1 Data Analysis Spiral with Thematic Analysis

Data managing refers to an organization of the data into a form that is coherent and useful to the researcher (Creswell, 2007). With the permission of participants, I audiotaped interviews and transcribed them verbatim to obtain digital copies. I also expanded my mental jottings into reflexive fieldnotes for participant observations.

After transcribing the interviews and writing reflexive fieldnotes, coding was the next step. The coding of research data plays a significant role in thematic data analysis in that it is key to generating themes. In the study, I read over and began coding interview transcripts to enrich my understanding of the research context and engage in an iterative data analysis process (Daly, 2007). I employed line-by-line coding, picking one word or small phrase that represented that line of the transcript (see Appendix E). Initial codes were transferred into a Microsoft Word document where a table was created, in one column listed the individual who was interviewed, and the next column included the initial codes that were generated from scribbled notes on the original transcript. Next, I employed focused coding, which is more selective in content, as the codes are directed towards how they reflect the purpose of the study (Charmaz, 2006). Here I looked at my initial codes list to identify the most prevalent codes and tested them across the data. This was done by reviewing all transcripts to confirm whether these codes are in fact the most prevalent. At this stage, I also began to create codes that reflected the purpose of this study (i.e. how is community built at the Burlington Seniors` Centre). The focused codes were added to the initial codes document under the individual`s name (see Appendix F). A master code list word document was also created to clearly outline all the codes that were gathered from initial coding and focused coding (see Appendix G). As I progressed through developing a range of focused codes, I shifted my focus to axial coding. Axial coding involves revisiting the categories

I had developed through the initial and focused coding processes to give coherence to the emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2006). By revisiting the categories and codes, I was able to create initial themes that were representative of the data (see Appendix H). The transcripts and fieldnotes were then revisited with different coloured highlighters to facilitate and visualize how the themes were reflected in the data. The highlighted verbatim quotes were then copied into a word document for writing up the findings section (see Appendix I).

Reading and memoing reflects how data analysis goes on through the life of a qualitative study (van den Hoovard, 2015). Based on the emergent quality of thematic data analysis, I continually found myself moving between coding processes (Daly, 2007). For instance, focused codes and initial themes were modified as I dove deeper into the intersections between the transcripts, thereby enriching the depth of analysis (see Appendix J). Charmaz (2006) argues that codes arise from meanings and perspectives of participants as well as our own. I embraced this by recognizing that my own interpretations of the codes are based on working at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. I was mindful of the value personal perspectives and experiences played in refining codes, memos, and themes, while also regularly revisiting the data to ensure interpretations accurately represented the insights of study participants.

I maintained three sets of memos through the thematic data analysis process: procedural, personal, and analytic. Procedural memos are notes that contain data analysis procedures and general inquiry decisions (Berbary & Boles, 2014). Procedural memos were developed to keep track of what I was doing through the data analysis process (see Appendix K) and acted as an agenda to keep me productive.

> January 14, 2019: I finished the initial fieldnotes for the Ballroom Line Dancing class to ensure that I was capturing important details of how the class was set up, description of the activity taking place, verbal/physical behaviour and interactions between participants, and personal reflection of what I witnessed.

Personal memos were used to reflect on my experiences and insecurities throughout the

data analysis process (see Appendix K). Writing personal memos allowed me to track my

assumptions and feelings as I proceeded through data collection and analysis.

> February 7, 2019: I wanted to do this interview with Tina because she was both a
> participant in recreation programs and an instructor of one of the Current Affairs classes.
> When I was setting up the interview with Tina over the phone, I got the idea that she felt
> that I worked for the Burlington Seniors' Centre. I had to clarify that I was completing a
> research project for my master's degree and that I did not work at the Burlington Seniors'
> Centre. During our conversation, Tina was completely engaged and we had a great
> discussion. We were not able to get through all of the questions because Tina would go
> on long tangents about one topic, and when I tried to move on to the next question, she
> would continue on the same tangent. I was curious to see what I would get out of this
> data when transcribing and analyzing.

Analytic memos were used to reflect on emergent categories and themes during the data

analysis process (see Appendix L). Categories and themes that emerged through the data were

associated with the research questions for this study. For example:

> Research Question 2: What meanings do older adults associate with their participation in
> recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?
> Categories/Themes: Importance of social connections; improving while aging

Describing, classifying, and interpreting represents a stage of analysis that incorporates

categorical aggregation to establish themes and patterns (Creswell, 2007). Stake (1995)

recommends looking for multiple "instances" from the data, hoping that "issue relevant"

meanings will emerge. This was accomplished through the analysis steps as described

previously. I used analysis steps suggested by Charmaz (2006) for initially exploring codes in

interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes, then used focused coding to create categories by

revisiting these initial codes. Categories for each research question were created from a master

codes list. For example,

> Research Question 1: How do older adult program participants, volunteers and recreation
> practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?

Categories/Themes: Quality of program instructors; extending welcome and personalized experiences

The process of interpretation in case study research is a dynamic and emergent process (Yin, 2009). After reviewing categories, I revisited the transcripts to understand what was said by participants to reorganize, regroup, and rename themes. Through this process, Creswell (2007) describes that these categories become themes that are organized into the findings that were presented in this study. By the end of the thematic analysis process, I had five themes: *shared experiences lead to caring relationships, value derived from participation, community experiences, structuring experiences, and integrating belonging and community into daily practice.*

Representation was achieved through the findings and discussion sections of this thesis. To reiterate, the case for representation was how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants. This was analyzed through three concentric circles: the recreation practitioners, older adult participants, and the recreation programs.

Document analysis was used to understand what role (if any) community plays in recreation programming. Verbatim quotes from the interview transcripts were used to convey the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences and how community is built by older adults and recreation practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Reflexive fieldnotes from the observations were used to understand the culture being fostered in the recreation programs and interactions that participants were having. These data sets spoke to each other to develop findings that presented a full picture of the case. When writing up the themes and findings for this study, it is important to keep in mind that interpretations were provided upfront, followed by participant quotations as proof (Berbary & Boles, 2014). This allows for evidence of the validity of researcher interpretation.

3.9 Being an Ethical Researcher

Ethical considerations are at the forefront of all social research (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009; Creswell, 2007). Due to the intensive, in-depth nature of this qualitative case study, ethical considerations figured prominently in every stage of this study. This research adhered to the standards of ethical research identified by the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Waterloo. As previously discussed, I introduced my study to the participants of each recreation program on the first days of my observation to ensure everyone had a basic understanding of why I was there. I distributed relevant information letters and stressed that participation in the study was voluntary and told them that they could reach out to me if they were interested.

Ensuring the confidentiality of all study participants was a primary concern. When I was in the field for observations, I made sure that my research journal and all paperwork were kept in my bag. Throughout the transcription, data analysis and writing stages, I saved all documents containing personal identifiers on my secure hard drive. Pseudonyms were also assigned to all study participants, to protect the identities of all involved. A document containing all pseudonyms and actual names was compiled and is located on my hard drive.

The gatekeeper for the City of Burlington (Recreation Supervisor) and gatekeeper for the Burlington Seniors' Centre (Recreation Coordinator) played a role in this study. The Recreation Supervisor put me into contact with the Recreation Coordinator, who told some older adults about the project. As mentioned previously, the Recreation Coordinator sent an email to potential older adult participants with my contact information attached, so they could reach out if they were interested in participating in the study. I was not copied on this email, but rather my email address was included in the information letter so that these individuals had a way of getting into

contact with me. However, there are implications of the Recreation Coordinator reaching out to these individuals, as they may have felt pressured to participate.

3.9.1 Establishing Trustworthiness and Authenticity

As an ethical researcher, I strived to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of study data and representation of participants. According to Bryman, Teevan, and Bell (2009), trustworthiness and authenticity consist of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. According to Patton (2015), credibility is the alignment of the researcher's representation of the findings with the participants' insights. Member checking was used to enhance the credibility of my study. After completing individual transcripts, I sent a copy to the participant via email. In the email, participants were asked to review the document, make necessary clarifications and corrections, and send the edited version back to me. Two participants sent me minor corrections (e.g. clarifying names and dates), which helped to strengthen the accuracy of the transcript.

Transferability is the degree to which a researcher provides sufficient information to allow the reader to relate the findings to similar cases (Patton, 2015). To address transferability, I clearly described my research process and methods used so that readers understand the context of the study and worked to develop a thick description with the findings by providing interpretations followed by participant quotations. Patton (2015) describes dependability as the ability of the researcher to report a thorough understanding of the research design, detailing data collection and analysis, and reflecting on the research process. Dependability was addressed by keeping a record of what was done in the research process through the use of memos (i.e. procedural, personal, and analytic). Lastly, confirmability is the assurance that the research findings are based on the participants' insights rather than potential researcher bias (Patton,

2015). To attend to confirmability, I addressed my assumptions through reflexive journaling to keep track of what was happening in the research process.

3.9.2 Personal Perspective and Reflexive Journaling

Throughout the research process, I engaged in self-reflective practices by maintaining a reflexive journal. I acknowledged that inherent power issues may exist between myself as the researcher and participants, as this presents ethical implications:

My place in the programs? – 01/18/2019

> An occurrence that came up in my observations involves my role in them. During this first week of observations, the instructors asked if I would be willing to participate alongside the participants. In both Ballroom Line Dancing and Men's Fit, I hesitated – a sign that I am wrestling with my researcher and participant roles still. I did agree to all requests to participate in the programs. However, I am mindful of how I may have looked in these programs and what ideas participants were formulating about me. I wonder how the older adults will view me, if they see me as a competent dancer/in shape vs. solely a researcher. This may influence the conversations that I have with these individuals in interviews and future program times. Overall, I view participating in the programs, when asked by instructors or participants, as a necessity to continued participation and for the older adults to feel more comfortable with my presence.

In this example, my hesitation to participate in the programs when asked illustrates how I was mindful of the way older adults viewed me. The reflexive entry above provides an example of the continuous questioning of my place and role in the programs. These thoughts stayed with me throughout the research process and demonstrated the challenge of continually wrestling with my researcher and participant selves.

My recreation values also figured prominently throughout the study. I truly believe that recreation is a great way for individuals to socialize and participate in their local community. Through reflexive journaling, I continually reflected on how this belief shaped my perspective of the findings I was generating. This process became equally important when I encountered

descriptions of negative experiences from the program participants during the interviews. The following reflexive entry captured one of these situations:

Reflecting on a hard interview – 01/21/2019

Wow, that interview was tough! I couldn't help feeling a combination of surprise and sympathy after hearing about Louise's negative experiences with the transition from volunteer board involvement to the City of Burlington having full control of operations at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Yet, Louise points out an important consideration. Who is in charge of programming and other opportunities at the seniors' centre can have a considerable impact on participant experience, specifically if they had a connection to the board.

This was something I had to keep in mind throughout the study as someone who worked at the centre and who also maintains a positive viewpoint of municipal recreation. When I worked at the Burlington Seniors' Centre in 2017, the City of Burlington had two years of full operation since the switch from collaboration with the board in 2015. In this role, I did not consider the impact that this switch in power would have on recreation program participants. This enabled me to uncover significant study findings, as well as enrich my personal perspective of recreation.

Keeping a reflexive journal allowed me to uncover potential power issues and keep my assumptions in check. These entries represent a few examples of the topics that I addressed throughout my reflexive journal. As someone who has previously worked at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, reflexive journaling allowed me to understand that even if changes in functioning happened years ago (e.g. switch from board to city-run), this can impact participants experiences to this day.

3.9 Chapter Review

In this chapter, I have outlined how a qualitative case study methodology and constructivist approach facilitated the collection and analysis of the research data. Researcher

reflexivity and ethical considerations were also discussed to illustrate the diverse considerations informing the study. These different considerations led to the development of important insights into how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants. In the next chapter, an analysis of the promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals are provided, followed by a presentation of the thematic chapters.

Chapter 4: Messaging in Promotional and Policy Texts

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes my analysis of promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals that affect community building at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The findings in this chapter relate to research question three: *what role (if any) does community play in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?* After analyzing promotional materials and staff policies and procedures manuals, I became familiarised with important documents so that interview questions could be tailored. The information presented in this chapter also provides the reader with the necessary context to understand the subsequent findings and discussion. I will start by providing an outline of how documents were selected and analyzed before discussing the findings.

4.1 Selection and Analysis of Documents

Seven City of Burlington documents from 2015 to 2018 were analyzed to understand what role (if any) community plays in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Three promotional materials including the City of Burlington website, Live and Play Guide, and Adults 55+ Program Booklet were analyzed to understand the recreation program and volunteer opportunities for older adults. These materials were selected as they are available to the public, so I was interested in getting a perspective of what the older adults see before they choose to participate at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Four policies and procedures manuals including the City of Burlington Official Plan (2017), City of Burlington Strategic Plan (2015-2040), the Halton Older Adult Plan (2015-2018), and the Burlington Active Aging Plan (2017) were analyzed to understand the city-wide initiatives and policies that influence the development of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities.

The seven documents analyzed are as follows:

1. *City of Burlington website*

2. *City of Burlington Live and Play Guide* (160 pages)

3. *City of Burlington Adults 55+ Program Booklet* (60 pages)

4. *City of Burlington Official Plan* (2017) (530 pages)

5. *City of Burlington Strategic Plan* (2015-2040) (34 pages)

6. *Halton Older Adult Plan* (2015-2018) (40 pages)

7. *Burlington Active Aging Plan* (2017) (44 pages)

The method employed for document analysis draws from Chalip's (1995) policy analysis framework. Analysis of each document followed a specific procedure to ensure consistency and support the collection of more relevant information. The policy analysis framework developed by Chalip (1995) has been adapted to determine if the legitimations (rationale) and attributes of promotional materials and policy and procedures documents have included or excluded the needs and interests of older adults in recreation programming. According to Misener (2001),

> The legitimations critique allows for an examination of policy goals to determine the rationale underlying the development of policies. The attributions critique focuses on the presumed cause of social problems that direct policy creation, by identifying recommended actions towards addressing the problem. This analysis thus allows for the systematic identification of policies/recommendations pertaining to specific groups (p. 20).

Based on Chalip's (1995) policy analysis framework, I developed a document analysis framework (see Appendix M) to identify the following: key actors, focusing events, problem definition(s), legitimation(s), attribution(s), and specific reference to older adults, recreation programming, volunteer opportunities, building community, and the Burlington Seniors' Centre. To ensure consistency, I began by identifying the key persons involved in creating the document and focusing events that may have framed the document issue(s). I then identified the

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rationale(s) for each document, and the solution(s) proposed. By identifying the legitimations and attributions of each document, I was able to identify the problem definitions. Where possible, I identified a specific reference to older adults, recreation programming, volunteer opportunities, building community, and the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The procedures used to analyze each document followed these steps:

1. Identify key actors and focusing events

2. Identify legitimation(s) stated in the document

3. Identify problem definition(s)

4. Identify attribution(s) stated in the document

5. Identify specific policy(ies)/recommendations/references of older adults, recreation programming, volunteer opportunities, building community, and the Burlington Seniors' Centre

From this list of analysis steps, I then focused on the development of common themes in promotional materials and policy and procedures manuals. Charts from each document were compared to see if there were any commonalities in reference to language and initiatives that contribute to the building of community. After analyzing the promotional materials, I concluded that one message was apparent in these publicly accessible documents: *The City of Burlington is a caring community*. In assessing the staff policies and procedures manuals, I determined that there was an *alignment of objectives* with the promotional materials.

4.2 The City of Burlington is a Caring Community

Promotional materials (1, 2, 3) provide information on recreation programs, volunteer opportunities, and access to other important resources offered to older adults throughout the City of Burlington. Promotional materials were accessible via the internet for those individuals who

prefer electronic copies and who may not be able to get to the centre. Physical copies of the promotional materials were also available at each recreation facility in Burlington. The Burlington Active Aging Plan describes how *"the city will continue to use paper means to reach people who prefer not to use technology through posters, postcards, and advertisements. Plain language and text size are considered in all applications"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 36). For those older adults who may not speak English or English is not their first language, the Halton Region offers "2-1-1and 3-1-1" which provides information on social and community services in another language.

Aspects of these documents play a part in describing what an experience of participating can be like at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Depicted as *"a caring community"*, community is *"a part of life at the Burlington Seniors' Centre"* (Adults 55+ website). In fact, two descriptions within the Recreation Program Booklet revealed the significance of community – *"connected to community"* and *"vibrant community"* – highlighted the feeling of a sense of comfort in opportunities (p. 10).

Described as a *"model for individuals who require confidential fee assistance to support memberships and programs"* (Recreation Program Booklet, p.11), the City of Burlington conveyed confidence about individual decisions to get involved through their *"dedication to meeting the needs of citizens"* and by *"ensuring the safe provision of recreation programs for participants"* (Recreation Program Booklet, p. 11). This language clearly articulates that older adults would feel comfortable in their recreation program and volunteer participation, but I wondered how this was done. Specifically, how did recreation practitioners ensure a comfortable provision of recreation programs for their participants? Were there on-going staff training

opportunities that focused on how to support and foster a caring community? These questions formed some of the topics that I explored in interviews and participant observations.

The terminology of *"inclusive community"* (Adult 55+ website) builds on the language of the City of Burlington being caring. I was wondering what opportunities were available for older adults to get involved and find their *"inclusive community"*, specifically if they were not interested in participating in recreation programs. Two opportunities stood out: *1) Volunteering* and *2) Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee*. Described as *"the key to success and the face of our caring community"*, volunteers are significant to operations for the City of Burlington. Individuals who are interested in volunteering are asked to complete a short survey with questions such as: *"personal interests: why would you like to volunteer with us?"* and *"past experiences: have you volunteered or worked in areas that could contribute to your volunteer role?"* (Volunteer website). These questions allow the older adults to select a volunteer opportunity that aligns with their interests or past careers that they held, helping to personalize their experience. Some of these positions include front desk assistant, chef's assistant, and program assistant. Older adults can volunteer at different locations throughout the city including Brant Hills Community Centre, Haber Community Centre, and Burlington Seniors' Centre. A variety in options allows the older adults to choose a location and position that is convenient for them.

The second way to get involved is with the Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee. Conveyed as a *"citizen committee reporting to the council"*, the Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee represents the *"seniors' perspective on municipal issues including parks and recreation services"* (Advisory committee website). Meetings with the Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee allow older adults to speak on issues that affect their lives. Although the

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meetings are not held at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, the information and feedback relate to recreation program delivery for older adults, showing that what had been discussed is put into practice.

Through an analysis of promotional materials, it became clear that the theme of *Burlington is a caring community* centred around four main ideas – *staff care*, *staff support meaningful social connections*, *developing new relationships*, and *sharing stories*.

4.2.1 Staff Care

Paying particular attention to the language used in the documents, I looked for references of older adults, recreation programming, and the Burlington Seniors' Centre. As I continued through this process, the word *"care"* was prevalent. Both "care" and its associated *"caring"*, were used in all documents, emphasizing the culture of "care" present in the City of Burlington and the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

As a potential new recreation program participant or volunteer, an environment filled with caring people could be a contributing factor in choosing to participate at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The language communicated that practitioners and instructors at the Burlington Seniors' Centre cared, but I wondered how. Words including *"compassionate"*, *"friendly"*, and *"inclusive"* when paired with *"care"* became significant rather than seeing the word *"care"* on its own. These descriptive words showed capability on the part of the staff that older adults would be attracted to when considering participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. I made sure to follow up on these ideas in interviews with practitioners.

The documents also described how staff supported older adults in all aspects of involvement at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. I was interested to learn that staff are *"trained in 'Customer First' service to make welcoming, responsive, and professional service a quality*

standard" (Burlington Active Aging Plan, 2017, p. 29). An emphasis on *"welcoming*

professional service" suggested that staff place a priority in making individuals feel accepted

and embraced. The mention of *"customer first service"* was also of interest, because this

language reads that individual needs will be met if they choose to get involved at the Burlington

Seniors' Centre. There was little information in these documents to support staff initiatives

towards fostering *"customer first service"*, so I wanted to get examples of what this looked like

in interviews with the practitioners. Older adults could interact with practitioners and instructors,

but also other participants at the centre. Meaningful personal connections were described as

supported at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.2 Staff Support Meaningful Social Connections

Defined as *"vibrant"*, *"welcoming"*, and *"engaging"*, an emphasis on participation at the

Burlington Seniors' Centre underscored the practitioners' belief in the significance of

meaningful connections with others. Social connections are fostered through recreation

programs, volunteer opportunities, and collaborations with community groups according to the

promotional materials. The Burlington Seniors' Centre has recreation programs and volunteer

opportunities, allowing older adults to be social, which is *"key to a healthy lifestyle"* (Recreation

Program Booklet). Also, the Burlington Active Aging Plan allowed the Adult 55+ practitioners

to engage with community partners and make them aware of issues that affect the older adult

population. A description of how the Burlington Active Aging Plan was created is outlined

below.

> The experience and expertise of numerous individuals and organizations have informed
> the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan. The plan has been prepared based
> on insights and perspectives of Burlington residents, city staff, elected officials, local and
> regional community partners and other stakeholders interested in older adult issues and
> the continual improvement of the quality of community life (Burlington Active Aging
> Plan, 2017, p. 9).

This collaborative effort to create a city-wide document with multiple stakeholders illustrates the connections developed and maintained with community partners. The Recreation Program Booklet also used language that encourages older adults to develop relationships with practitioners. Phrases such as *"please book your appointment ahead of time, in person, or by the phone"* was used (Recreation Program Booklet, p. 59). The implication of this reference could be that older adults feel that the practitioners are more accessible, and they are willing to hear their concerns regarding program changes or new session schedules.

The Burlington Seniors' Centre encourages individuals to develop relationships with program participants, volunteers, and local organizations with the intention of remaining *"socially connected"* (Adult 55+ website). Through the promotional materials, there was a large emphasis on nurturing new connections and relationships. The Burlington Seniors' Centre describes their membership as providing the guaranteed benefit of *"meeting people in your community"* (Adult 55+ website). I questioned if this was relevant for all older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre because some people could pay the registration fee for the program and not be a member. Also, older adults could participate in the program and choose not to interact with others. These were thoughts and ideas that I chose to investigate through conducting on-site observations. The program descriptions in the Recreation Program Booklet were lacking a description of the connections and relationships with instructors that would be fostered. If relationships were an important part of building community, how were relationships developed between staff and participants? This question was explored through both interviews and observations.

4.2.3 Sharing Stories

According to the Centre Piece, a magazine that illustrates participants experiences in recreation programs, volunteer opportunities, and day trips, stories from older adults are valued. The Centre Piece is published at the start of every program session (i.e. Fall 2018, Winter 2019, Spring 2019), allowing participants to share their program and volunteer experiences through stories, poems, and other art forms. Older adults were also encouraged to give suggestions regarding their experiences by submitting concerns in a suggestion box. Entitled *"You said…we did"*, this section provides answers to the questions and suggestions from the Adult 55+ practitioners.

> Concern: The move to registering for two sessions is financially difficult for me, what are my options?
>
> Answer: When Adult 55+ recreation services moved to the same registration process used by all other recreation program sections, we made sure that the payment options were available to reduce financial constraints. You can defer payment for the second session until a later date. The deferred payment date is very close to past registration dates and follows important government cheque issuing timelines, as we know this is an important consideration for some. At this moment, this option is only available for in-person registrations (Centre Piece, 2019, p. 2).

By having a section of promotional material dedicated to suggestions, this illustrates that the practitioners are taking the older adults concerns seriously and are doing something to address their concerns. While analyzing the Centre Piece, I considered implications of how participants' stories and reflections were chosen. Did participants at the Burlington Seniors' Centre choose to share their experiences and/or were they nervous to get a judgment on their submissions? These were ideas that I explored through interviews with both practitioners and older adult participants.

This section gave an overview of my assessment of how the promotional materials send the message of *"Burlington is a caring community"*. Looking specifically at the language used in

promotional materials, it was evident that practitioners took suggestions from the older adults into consideration when developing recreation programs and other opportunities as seen with the collaborative effort on the Burlington Active Aging Plan. Meaningful personal connections were also described as being fostered in the inclusive environment of the Burlington Seniors Centre. The policy and procedures manuals written for practitioners of the City of Burlington are analyzed in the next section. The following section will describe how these themes (i.e. Burlington is a caring community) were (or were not) translated into practice and implementation. Incorporating what I learned from the promotional materials, I sought to analyze how practitioners and staff act in ways that support older adult participants to consider the Burlington Seniors' Centre as their *"caring community"*. Additional themes from the analysis of these documents will also be discussed.

4.3 Policy of Care in an Aging Community

The policies and procedures manuals were developed to outline city-wide initiatives and they guide different departments on how these will be achieved through practice. After analyzing the policy and procedures manuals, I concluded that there was a policy of care, showing a clear connection to the promotional materials. The policies and procedures manuals were also analyzed with an aging lens, to understand how these documents were created for the older adult population. Language from the promotional materials was also included in the policies and procedures manuals. The ideas of being a *"caring, friendly, and inclusive community"* were evident in these texts. Also, notions of *"aging"* were often discussed in policies and procedures that addressed the older adult population. To understand the language related to aging I looked for messages regarding *"age"* and its associated *"aging"*. These messages involved the diversity

of the older adult population in terms of abilities and interests, and were explored mainly through the Burlington Active Aging Plan document.

Four themes were developed from my analysis of the policies and procedures documents: *strategic community direction*, *language of inclusivity and diversity*, *celebrating individuality and independence*, and *age-friendly language*.

4.3.1 Strategic community direction

City-wide policies and procedures documents included strategic initiatives that focused on community development. The Official Plan describes the direction for growth and development in the City of Burlington. Consistent with the analysis of the promotional materials, some of the language was focused on creating a *"caring community"*. Speaking broadly, the Halton Region envisions a community for *"older adults to have opportunities and choices for meaningful activities, employment, social actions, and healthy lifestyles"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 9). The City of Burlington also *"promotes design to create accessible places that foster social interaction and a sense of place"* (Official Plan, 1.5.1). I wondered whether older adults and recreation practitioners considered the Burlington Seniors' Centre to be an accessible place where individuals could engage in meaningful activities. These were ideas that I discussed in interviews with these two groups.

The City of Burlington Strategic Plan (2015-2040) is a *"framework for critical decision-making and considers how the city manages its resources"* (City of Burlington, 2015, p. 2). In consultation with the community, the City of Burlington identified four key strategic directions that would be addressed in the strategic plan: *"a city that grows"*, *"a city that moves"*, *"a healthy and greener city"* and *"an engaging city"*. Relevant areas to the older adult population include a *"city that moves"* as older adults often rely on public transportation due to reasons

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including that they cannot drive anymore, convenience, and health-related constraints. By

acknowledging that the older adult population is increasing, the city has developed procedures

that are working to build more *"mobility hubs"* defined as *"a concentrated point for transit and*

recreation" (p. 31). By building more mobility hubs around the city, this gives older adults

increased access to both transit and recreation. Also, a *"healthy and greener city"* is of

relevance. This section describes how *"recreation and sports programs are widely available to*

all residents in the City of Burlington" (City of Burlington, 2015, p. 21). Tracking processes

such as surveys and suggestion boxes are used by practitioners to measure the number of

participants and satisfaction that they are getting from recreation programs. By gaging the

number of participants, and soliciting satisfaction in programs, the recreation practitioners use

this data to improve future program opportunities. Lastly, plans to create *"an engaging city"* are

of relevance. This pillar was a prime example of how the notion of *"care"* for an *"aging*

population" was communicated. Described as *"residents being engaged creates a positive sense*

of place, inclusivity, and community" (City of Burlington, 2015, p. 26), the City of Burlington

has developed a Charter of Good Governance, which allows residents to be engaged in decision-

making processes. I must admit to a level of discomfort with the message here. Are all residents

allowed to be involved in decision-making processes or only those invited by staff? Also, in what

capacity are people involved in these processes? These were questions that I addressed in the

interviews with recreation practitioners.

    4.3.2 Language of Inclusivity and Diversity

    Discussions of inclusion and diversity were intertwined in the policy and procedures

manuals. The Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Assets Master Plan acknowledges that recreation

programs are becoming *"increasingly segmented"* in terms of activity type and user groups,

therefore facilities and services *"need to meet different user expectations to respond to the diverse population"* (City of Burlington, 2009, p. 3.2). Ongoing evaluation, identification of needs and trends, and research on best practices are used to continually improve and modify recreation programs to respond to these different interests. The City of Burlington has also developed a financial subsidy program that is available to support individuals' participation; *"Burlington ensures access to recreation is supported by offering a spectrum of affordably priced services and offers fee assistance to those in need*" (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 29). In interviews with practitioners and older adults, I probed around the different interests that are being researched to offer more diverse programming.

Content from the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Assets Master Plan discuss how the City of Burlington needs to *"support inclusion by enhancing participation for identifiable groups who may be experiencing constraints to participation"* (City of Burlington, 2009, p. 3.2). There was a lack of explanation given in terms of identifying the demographic groups who experience constraints, so I made sure to discuss this in further detail during the practitioner interviews. This document also explained how there are *"differing levels of involvement"* in both recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Reflecting back on the analysis of promotional materials including program descriptions, it was clear that there was a range in sports programs from *"learn to play"* to *"high-level tournament-style"*. The Burlington Active Aging Plan describes inclusion as *"welcoming differences and encouraging diversity"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 34). I was struck by the passive nature of this language and wondered how staff interpreted the words of *"identifiable groups"* and *"constraints"* in the above references. What tangible actions are implied in this statement? How did staff make an inclusive environment that is accommodating of all individuals? And what opportunities were present for staff to

acknowledge the diverse older adult participants? These questions were explored in both the interviews and observations.

There was specific language targeted diversity in the policy and procedures manuals. The Halton Older Adult Plan (HOAP) recognizes that *"individuals experience aging differently"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 8). The HOAP specified how older adults are diverse in terms of their *"socio-economic status, physical and sensory abilities, literacy levels, generational attitudes, marital status, newcomers, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural backgrounds, and identity"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 5). There were broad descriptions given for each of these, so I made sure to elaborate on these in the interviews with the older adult participants to understand how they experience aging and participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

There was also a more specific language regarding inclusion in the HOAP. This document explains how *"older adults living alone often experience more isolation, neglect, elder abuse, and poorer health"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 28). This could be a way for understanding the responsibility of practitioners and staff for identifying opportunities to foster social connections through recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The HOAP explains that enhancing access to regional services for older adults is a way for them receive resources and services in a way that is acceptable to them, including those that are vulnerable and/or marginalized. While analyzing this document, I felt a sense of discomfort with the underlying message here. Labelling people who *"are not involved because they live alone"* set up a deficits-based image of individuals who *"do not have the agency to have relationships"*. This was something that I explored in interviews with older adults to see whether they had concerns about the language used in promotional materials.

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The Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Assets Master Plan suggested that the City of Burlington *"develop a Cultural Plan and work in partnership with cultural stakeholders"*. I wondered what the practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre considered to be a *"cultural stakeholder"*. Also, what would the dynamic of these relationships look like between stakeholders? Lastly, what community groups would be exposed to the Burlington Seniors' Centre? These were all questions that I addressed in interviews with practitioners. I wanted to learn how practitioners connected with cultural stakeholders and how programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre was able to serve a culturally diverse older adult population. As will be discussed in the findings chapters, the practitioners described how they are looking to expand their cultural programs by collaborating with community organizations.

4.3.2.1 Social Inclusion

"Social inclusion" is a sub-category of inclusion, identified by my analysis, that focuses on ensuring citizens have access to *"social, recreational, cultural, and spiritual activities that foster supportive relationships, community connections, and enhance the quality of life"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 20). Social inclusion is important for an aging population as they are often going through significant life transitions (e.g. retirement). This pillar in the Burlington Active Aging Plan discussed considerations that include *"reducing age-related stigmas"* and *"increasing variety and flexibility of recreation services"*. An example of how this is currently achieved is by offering *"honourary participation discounts for recreation programs to adults aged 90 years and over"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 29). The message of this initiative has the potential to encourage individuals to continue their involvement with the Burlington Seniors Centre' as they age, either through volunteering or recreation program participation, showing that age should not stop their participation. I pondered how much of a discount was involved in

the honourary participation and whether practitioners saw this as something that largely affected individuals continued involvement at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. This was discussed in interviews with the recreation practitioners.

The summary of key considerations in the social inclusion pillar of the Burlington Active Aging Plan outlines how "*increasing options and communication for closer-to-home and in-home services*" is a priority (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 27). The City of Burlington is currently working on developing a teleconference initiative, where volunteers will be trained on calling socially isolated older adults and connect them with resources and community services, they need to further alleviate feelings of isolation. This is important and could be beneficial for those older adults who may be house-bound due to illnesses and physical limitations.

The policy and procedures manuals acknowledge how cultural diversity and older adult population are expanding in the City of Burlington. The Burlington Active Aging Plan acknowledged how *"Burlington will continue to work to create conditions of success where people of all backgrounds and lifestyles can participate fully"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 17). Further described as *"enhancing inclusive recreation program options by consulting and partnering with local organizations that consider cultural preferences, ethnic enclaves, and language sensitivities"*, this shows that recreation programs are being developed in consultation with local cultural organizations (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 30). The language used in these documents suggests that the Burlington Seniors' Centre will try to move towards sensitivity over competency. By stating that practitioners will partner with cultural organizations, this represents an example of cultural responsiveness. Werkmeister-Rozas and Waldo (2009) define cultural responsiveness as being about relationships—relationships with participants, their values, their support networks, and the community they come from. Practitioners and instructors at the

Burlington Seniors' Centre are required to pay attention and connect to multiple aspects of an individual's cultural makeup. I made sure to question the recreation practitioners about the social inclusion of newcomers and other marginalized groups to see how they ensured *"full participation"*.

4.3.3 Celebrating Individuality and Independence

Throughout the documents, a focus on respecting and meeting individual needs was evident. Promoting an environment where older adults were *"people first"*, the Burlington Active Aging Plan described the *"development of a Leisure Assessment Tool to assist participants in making program choices"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 31). This leisure assessment tool is a way to personalize older adults' recreation experiences, as they can choose a program that best suits their skills, needs, and interests. When interviewing the older adult participants, I made sure to question them regarding their program choices.

Program instructors and other staff were described as supporting older adults to *"thrive"* and remain independent: *"we ensure that citizens have access to rewarding volunteer and employment opportunities where they can continue to use their knowledge to remain engaged in civic life throughout the full life course"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 32). With the language of *"remaining engaged throughout the full life course"*, this indicates that there are both volunteer and employment opportunities available for older adults, so they can pick up a part-time job after they retire if they want to.

Several of the policy and procedures manuals acknowledge the importance of older adult participation in decision-making processes by *"engaging people on issues that affect their lives"*. As mentioned previously, the *"Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee"* and *"Community Engagement Charter"* provide a platform for older adults to get involved and have a say

regarding issues that affect their lives. With the Burlington Seniors' Advisory Committee, older adults *"provide input to city staff on issues regarding isolation and recreation services"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 36). The Community Engagement Charter *"represents a commitment to ensure all perspectives of the community are carefully considered in order to support local government decision making and action"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 33). Both opportunities allow for older adults to have their perspectives considered to make them feel valued in decision-making processes. Older adults were also encouraged to voice their opinions through other methods if they would not like to have an active role on a committee. Biannual surveys and regular meetings with residents *"allow practitioners to shape and improve how recreation, sport, and cultural services are developed"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 29). Providing various ways to get older adults involved in processes that affect their lives allows for accommodation of individual needs. These different methods and their effectiveness were included in the practitioner interviews.

4.3.4 Age-Friendly Language

"Age-friendly" language focuses on *"promoting healthy active aging by delivering programs and services to help residents maintain their independence as they age"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 31). Age-friendly outcomes were an integral part of planning the Halton Older Adult Plan. Using language such as *"inclusive"*, *"accessible"*, and *"engaging"*, this document identifies priorities for the older adult population. A main priority is described in this document as using an *"older adult perspective"* to outline the specific needs and preferences that these individuals have. Defined as *"a shared understanding of concerns and factors that can influence an older adult's quality of life and is based on the values and priorities that older adults have identified as important to them"*, this affects both recreation and volunteer participation.

"Continued engagement and consultation with older adults" on committees will allow practitioners to incorporate an older adult perspective into the planning process.

The Burlington Active Aging Plan also outlines age-friendly initiatives. The language within this document has a clear vision, *"Burlington is a caring and age-friendly city where citizens enjoy healthy, active lives and feel safe, connected and valued as they reach their full potential"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 18). The main priority of the Halton Older Adult Plan is independence and helping individuals *"age in place"* defined as *"the ability to remain in the community safely, comfortably, and independently"* (Halton Region, 2015, p. 22). I wondered how this document applies to individuals in long term care homes and retirement homes. The Burlington Active Aging Plan mentions how the city will "*continue to partner with the community to offer older adult learning seminars about security and health such as: financial planning, nutrition, retirement, emergency preparedness, fraud and estate planning*" (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 31). There was no language that related directly to engagement with retirement and long term care homes so I was left wondering, did these individuals have access to recreation programs and services offered at the Burlington Seniors' Centre? How can these people age in place if they are already out of their homes? Currently underway through the Burlington Active Aging Plan is *"developing a program stream which focuses on restorative leisure pursuits specifically designed for older adults and their care partners interested in sustaining independence, physical and mental well-being"* (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 30) These questions and ideas of partnering with care partners were addressed in interviews with the recreation practitioners.

4.4 Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented an analysis of promotional materials and policy and procedures manuals to understand how these documents say they will build community. Below is a summary table of questions from each theme that I could follow up on in interviews with practitioners and older adult participants. In the promotional materials, initial themes of Burlington being a caring community was evident, and for the most part this translated over to the policy and procedures manuals. Acknowledging diversity, providing opportunities for social inclusion and promoting age-friendliness were all important messages that affected practices at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Throughout the document analysis, questions were raised that were addressed in interviews with both practitioners and older adult participants, which will be discussed in further detail in the next two thematic chapters.

4.4.1 Follow-up ideas for interviews

Document Analysis Themes	Ideas to follow up on in interviews
COB is a caring community	How did recreation practitioners ensure comfortable experience for participants? Were there on-going staff training opportunities with focus on fostering community?
Staff support meaningful social connections	How were relationships fostered between staff and participants?
Sharing stories	Did older adult participants at BSC choose to share experiences and/or were they nervous to get judged on their submissions?
Strategic community direction	Are all older adults involved in decision-making processes or only those invited by staff? In what capacity are older adults involved in decision-making processes?
Language of inclusivity and diversity	What tangible actions are associated with "identifiable groups" or "constraints"? How do staff make an inclusive environment that is accommodating for all? What opportunities were present for staff to acknowledge diverse older adult participants? How is "full participation" ensured for newcomers or other marginalized groups?
Celebrating individuality and independence	Did older adults use the leisure assessment tool to make program choices? What opportunities are available for older adults to get involved in processes that affect their lives?
Age-friendly language	Did older adults in retirement homes or long term care homes have access to recreation programs and services? How can individuals in institutionalized care age in place if they are already out of their homes?

Table 2: Follow-up ideas for interviews

Outlining the Thematic Chapters

In this section of the thesis, I present findings from the interview data analysis stage of this research. These findings are divided into two thematic chapters: building community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, and experiencing community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These chapters provide two distinct perspectives, which expand our understanding of how community is built at a municipally-run seniors' centre. The building community theme considers the development of recreation program and volunteer opportunities by recreation practitioners and how this influences program experiences. The discussion is expanded to focus on the community building experiences of older adults in their recreation program and volunteer participation. Each theme contains various sub-themes. These thematic chapters deepen our understanding of community building for seniors' centre participation by uncovering the nuances and intersections between themes.

Chapter 5: Building Community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre

5.0 Introduction

The development of recreation programs and volunteer experiences is an important consideration for understanding how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. While the previous chapter presented an analysis of the messages in promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals, I now focus on the recreation practitioners to gain a broader understanding of the structural aspects of building community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Findings from interviews with the recreation practitioners, as well as content from the Burlington Active Aging Plan inform this discussion.

This chapter captures the increasing structure of both recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Findings from the recreation practitioner interviews are considered to understand how the increasing structure of recreation programs fosters community building. In this chapter, I explore the structure and formality of programs and volunteer positions, the extent to which these alterations affect the experiences of participants, in addition to various impacts on instructors. The notion of change is also framed as a challenge between participants, instructors, and practitioners. Culture change within the department has been an important priority at the Burlington Seniors' Centre but is perceived differently by the practitioners. How these differences influence the community building experiences of older adults are investigated to illustrate how the development of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities by practitioners shape the lived experiences of participants.

5.1 Structuring experiences

The theme *structuring experiences* describes how recreation practitioners believe that standardizing opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre enhances the experiences for older

adults. This strive towards standardization is evident through the Burlington Active Aging Plan that emerged from the growing demographic of older adults in the City of Burlington. Specific pillars of the Burlington Active Aging Plan inform the Burlington Seniors' Centre current recreation program development process. Furthermore, different program initiatives have been established to form the experiences of older adult participants. The relationships between certification and training of instructors are explored in this theme. *Structuring experiences* has three sub-themes: *contributing decisions in structuring experiences*, *development of instructional resources*, and *consistent program instruction*. These insights illustrate how the structuring of recreation programs influence community building experiences of older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

5.1.1 Contributing decisions in structuring experiences

The sub-theme *contributing decisions in structuring experiences* speaks to how recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors' Centre are becoming more formalized. Structuring emerges from the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan as well as decisions from recreation practitioners. This process involves creating more formalized programs to enhance the experiences for older adults.

Previous implementations of recreation programs lacked structure. Recreation practitioners described the disorganization of programs and lack of programs when they first started their position at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Claire recalled how there was a lack of formality to the program planning process.

> When I came to the City of Burlington, our program planning process wasn't very formalized, there wasn't a lot of structure behind it. Some programs had been established, and either people liked them or didn't like them. If people didn't show up to them, we saw a decrease in participation and that usually indicated that there needed to be a change (Claire).

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Recreation practitioners learned a lot from the previous implementation of programs. Claire explains how small changes led the Adults 55+ team at the Burlington Seniors' Centre to become more organized.

> We started making small changes. We started saying, 'what do we believe in? What is it we want to do? How does everything we do attach to that? How does the program demonstrate what we believe in?' (Claire).

Claire recognizes the value of creating more organized recreation programs ~~and volunteer opportunities~~ to ensure that older adults get the most out of their participation. This quotation also illustrates how the practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre engaged in self-reflection to improve the opportunities.

Ivy reiterated how the recreation programs and the instructors teaching the program originally lacked structure and consistency.

> When hiring an instructor, it was usually having a formal interview and selecting the best candidate. Instructors were on their own to teach the class. They could teach the program in whatever way they liked, so I am sure there was some consistency issues between instructors (Ivy).

Over the years, the development of recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors' Centre have become more formalized. In particular, the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan emerged including specific pillars (e.g. social inclusion, civic participation) that affect service delivery in these capacities. Jamie outlines the connection between the Burlington Active Aging Plan and practices at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> The Burlington Active Aging Plan is always a point of focus for that because it determines what we've proposed to council and what we told our council we would be doing for the next however many years. We have that connection of how we can tie our programming back to those larger city plans and let you know what's going on with those things (Jamie).

Ann spoke to how the Burlington Active Aging Plan affected city-wide programming for the older adult population.

In the Burlington Active Aging Plan, the city put forth several initiatives that could be addressed by recreation programming. Whether it be location-based, expanding recreation offerings in different communities within the city; those are certain things that we take into our planning (Ann).

Recently, recreation practitioners shifted their focus towards standardizing the leagues to become more formalized. Increasing standardization resulted in developing lesson plans, as well as regulating instructors.

Recreation practitioners began standardizing their programs by formalizing the curriculum and developing lesson plans. Jamie outlines the considerations behind these program changes.

There is a lot of connectivity between city-wide plans and our programs because we want to be able to report back and say, 'hey, this is what we've proposed we were going to do, this is how we've trained our instructors on how to do it, and here's the documentation because we now have documented program plans' (Jamie).

The Burlington Seniors' Centre recreation programs have seen a transition in implementation as discussed in this sub-theme. The incorporation of initiatives from the Burlington Active Aging Plan contribute to structured opportunities. As program plans provide instructional resources, I will now discuss how program lesson plans are structured.

5.1.2 Instructional resources

Instructional resources describe how lesson plans have been developed for recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The lesson plans are established in a way for participants to acquire new skills and improve on existing skills each week, while maintaining a social component. For example, in a Pickleball program, new participants are introduced to the court and equipment in the first week. In sequential weeks, participants review the components of the Pickleball court and equipment, as well as learn how to serve. The lesson plans are

organized so that participants are continuously improving on existing skills while learning

something new each week.

All lesson plans contain various drills, which allow older adults to apply what they learn

through practice, to improve their skills. For example, the series of drills involving serving for

Pickleball illustrate this progression. New participants perform these drills during the second

week of the program. In the first drill, participants learn how to hold their paddle and ball,

practicing their range of movement. Once new participants master this drill, they progress to

standing at the serving line and incorporating that range of movement into practice by attempting

to serve the ball over the net. The third drill involves partners serving back and forth to each

other. This final drill is challenging because one participant may be having more success than the

other, so practice and patience are needed. These drills illustrate the sequential design of drills,

focusing on providing older adults with skills and opportunities to improve these skills. These

drills help to develop skills that the older adults can use in gameplay. Below is a fieldnote from

one of my Pickleball observations where I was able to see these skills put to use.

Pickleball—01/14/2019

Everyone was familiar with the rules of the game. Games of Pickleball are played to a score of 11. The participants knew how to keep score, which group was in possession of the ball and how to serve/rally. Participants who were not playing and sitting on the side made the playing participants aware that a ball was on the floor. Safety is a key characteristic of the game because some participants have been hurt in the past while playing the game (e.g. fell and hit head on the wall when backpedaling to rally the ball).

With this fieldnote it is evident that the Pickleball participants are experienced players

and have learned how to correctly play the game through practiced skills developed in lessons.

All programs (as with Pickleball in the above example) cover the same content and drills

in a particular week. While instructors in the past did not follow lesson plans, lesson plans are

now required for teaching programs. Claire described how the requirement of lesson plans has

been a source of tension for some instructors.

> Working with our instructors is one of the hardest things we've done because they have a
> vested interest as their employment, so they don't want anything to go wrong. So, asking
> them to develop the program plans was challenging and we finally just force-fed this as a
> condition of employment. For an instructor to get involved in that aspect of planning and
> start organizing a program plan to show progression and development, that was
> challenging (Claire).

> While developing lesson plans in collaboration with instructors was a challenge, it was

also viewed as a strength. Ann described how the hired instructors were experts in the area, so

they were involved in what was included in the lesson plans.

> We go through the process and work with them to develop the program plan. So, we rely
> on the instructor as the subject matter expert to design the program that they are going to
> deliver. The coordinators collaborate with the instructors so that they're not trying to
> cover too much in a short amount of time (Ann).

> This structure of lesson plans and ensuring one progressive level flows into the next

serves to enhance program experiences for participants. Although this provides consistency in

program experiences for older adults, some instructors may see this transition as a challenge. The

transition to consistent program instruction is discussed next.

5.1.3 Consistent program instruction

Consistent instruction describes how program instructors are mandated to stick to the

program lesson plans. Instructors are now expected to teach recreation programs the same way,

allowing for consistent program experiences for older adults.

> Ivy explains this transition to a standardized instructing approach.

> We are moving out of volunteer instructors, the volunteers for instance are city staff.
> They are all city staff, we don't have any contracted anymore. Everybody is a city staff
> and we are all under the same umbrella. Same policies and procedures, we need to be
> familiar with that. One instructor is no different from me, so we all have to know our
> policies and procedures (Ivy).

Claire expands on the hierarchical transition to standardized instruction and the associated challenges.

> So, when you ask, how do you program plan? I think those are kind of on the micro-level. Those are the kind of things that we have been working on with staff so that they have missions and goals in mind, that they show development in all that they do, and that they have a pre-organized plan of how they are going to do it. That's been a big thing. As far as coordinators go, we have a real goal to put the right programs in the right spaces, and that again has a problem attached to it. Groups become attached to the locations where their activities are happening (Claire).

Standardizing program instruction and program plans is an important consideration at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The practitioners believe that having consistent program instruction enhances experiences for participants. Ivy speaks to how consistent instructors provide a quality experience for participants.

> Anyone likes to go to a place that feels like a home away from home. Our program quality is outstanding. Those are the reasons that they come here. Good quality instruction and affordable programming in a welcoming environment (Ivy).

Ann also emphasizes that having standardized instructors and a set program schedule provides added benefits, including consistency in the older adults' participants' lives. That said, the decreasing popularity in some programs allows the practitioners to get rid of those programs and develop new opportunities based on trends in the recreation field.

> I find with our recreation programs there's a cycle. So, for the most part, it's the same programs and the same instructors that we carry over session after session. However, every few years there tends to be a natural shake-up, we see a decline in several programs, then a lot of open time slots, and we're able to add something new and fresh and exciting which is what the community is looking for (Ann).

Ann, like the other recreation practitioners I spoke with, views standardized instruction as enhancing the experiences of program participants. However, this perspective may also clash with the experiences of older adults in programs as discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, the needs of some participants may fall outside of the perceptions of practitioners, leading to

unsatisfactory program experiences. Structuring experiences through lesson plan development and consistent instruction are a way that recreation practitioners attempt to build community for older adult participants. This will be discussed in more depth in the discussion chapter. The next theme portrays how connections are fostered for older adults, in addition to connections with community partners.

5.2 Integrating belonging and community into daily practice

The theme *integrating belonging and community into daily practice* describes the commitment of recreation practitioners to develop personal relationships with older adult participants, volunteers and the local community. *Integrating belonging and community into daily practice* has three sub-themes: *culture change*, *extending welcome and personalized experiences* and *maintaining connections with community partners*. These findings illustrate how community is built by recreation practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

5.2.1 Culture change

Culture change describes the ongoing shifts in practice, its associated implications and challenges with the transition. The work of recreation practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre has shifted in priorities, to working towards acknowledging the vibrant community of older adults. This sub-theme explores the shifts in practice that the recreation practitioners had been a part of or witnessed, and how this affected experiences and opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Claire is present in a lot of the decision-making processes that impact older adults in the City of Burlington. She shared her perspective of what initiated the culture change to plan recreation and volunteer opportunities for the older adult population.

> I looked at things very strategically and I felt that, quite honestly, in the City of
> Burlington, there was somewhat of a lag between the potential for recreation and older

adults and where we were sitting. I wanted to close that gap and make us a leader in municipal recreation for older adults (Claire).

Age-friendly practices have been growing in municipalities around Ontario. In 2017, the City of Burlington developed the Burlington Active Aging Plan (BAAP), which contains policies that directly impact recreation program provision at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Claire commented on the purpose of the BAAP and how it affects practices.

> The BAAP outlines what we do, how we do it, and what we should be doing. So, I gear initiatives and programs towards that, and I have a road map for the next million years if I want because there's a lot in the document (Claire).

A growing older adult population contributed to a significant change in seniors' centre practices. By promoting a more social model at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, Jamie sought to recognize a holistic quality that was more reflective of participating at seniors' centres.

> Recreation programs are only one of the services we provide, right? Those are important, but so is volunteering, so is socialization, so is staying busy, so is a quality of life from so many perspectives. That's all just as important as getting involved in recreation programs. There are about 50 volunteers at the seniors' centre (Jamie).

With over three years of working at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, Claire reflected on some of the changes. Claire sought to change the perceptions of older adults in the Burlington community in hopes of confronting ageist perspectives.

> I want to make a cultural shift so that older adults are seen as vibrant and contributing members of our society. I want to see a cultural shift within our staff, and by this, I mean all employees of the city. I want them to see older adults as again, just vibrant individuals. I didn't see that level of respect necessarily permeating through all aspects of the city when I first came on board, and I think that shift has started to occur (Claire).

As a member of the management team at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, Claire shared her older adult focused managerial approach.

> Am I proud of what we're doing and the progress that we've made? Absolutely. I think there's been a change in profile for how people look at older adults in the last few years. So, we're going down that pathway, and I've ticked off a few goals that we've had regarding planning for older adults. So, we are now providing more opportunities to play,

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more days of the year, longer hours, moving into weekends, moving into more local hub kind of easier to access locations. My five-year plan, I'm at three and a half years and I would say I'm right on track with that. That's the biggest thing about my job, just staying motivated and pushing forward, and making a change, and becoming a progressive department (Claire).

The recreation practitioners, who are currently not experiencing aging in the same way as the older adults spoke to the vibrancy of these individuals. Jamie, the newest addition to the Adults 55+ Team, was previously the recreation coordinator for the youth department. Jamie explained his transition between the two roles.

It's been very interesting to go from one age group to the next and sort of see what the progression of recreation is throughout an entire life span. Recreation is recreation, regardless of age. I think both of the different age areas have their specific things that are very specific to them. What I've noticed is that with our adult customers, they experience the program directly, and they are looking for a specific recreation experience. With a youth program, the child is experiencing the program but the parent is very much involved (Jamie).

The other recreation coordinator, Ann, used to work in retirement and long-term care facilities, so her perception of older adults was different then what she is involved with now at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Coming here and seeing how active everyone is was an eye-opener for me and it was cool and awesome to be involved in it. Over the years, I've seen sort of the older, the 80+ age group shrink and having more of the 55+ come in and join us and being more involved (Ann).

Both Jamie and Ann's perceptions of older adults and aging have changed. Working at the Burlington Seniors' Centre has allowed them to gain experience of working with and developing programs for vibrant older adults, thereby challenging and changing their initial perceptions. Acknowledging this vibrant community has allowed the recreation practitioners to continue their community building efforts.

These quotes translated to my observations. Only working a short position with an older adult population, I was somewhat unfamiliar of what these individuals were capable of in terms

of their recreation program participation. The fieldnote below shows some of my concerns of

participating alongside some of the older adults in a line dancing class.

<p align="center">Ballroom Line Dancing (Beginner)—2019/01/21</p>

> I wanted to have a conversation with Louise because she fell early in the program. Being 80 years of age this could have been a painful and severe fall, but she fell on her butt which she described as "very cushioned". As I was talking with Louise, she explained to me how important this class was to her personal wellbeing and how it "keeps her young".

This informal conversation with Louise allowed me to learn that older adults are more

resilient then I give them credit for. I need to remember that while I may be well-intentioned, I

shouldn't be assuming that Louise would be hurt because she is older than me. This interaction

and experiences throughout program observations allowed for my assumptions of the older adult

population to be challenged, tying into this sub-theme of culture change that practitioners

mentioned in their interviews.

Although there have been strides made to improve the culture at the Burlington Seniors'

Centre, there are still areas that are lagging. Claire spoke to the concept of inclusivity as one of

these improvement areas.

> We are lagging in that area [social isolation] for sure. I feel that while today's youth have kind of grown up in an inclusive environment and school's that are inclusive. With an older generation that may not have had the luxury of having diverse individuals around them, that inclusion is a trend that we can work on. 2019 is going to be about providing equal, easy access for individuals that may have disabilities, and cognitive ones especially. In that area, we are finding that our participants don't demonstrate the same acceptance that younger generations may have (Claire).

Ivy described expanding the cultural offerings as an area of improvement that she would

like to see in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> Different cultures, not as many as I would like. I think our programming may need to expand more, a little more diverse in the programming aspect of things. We are getting there in our surveys, which are being distributed in the community. You tell us what you need, and we will do our best to cater to that. We are getting a lot of, lots of different languages are coming in through the door, so we are using and trying to see how we are

handling that. I would say more in languages. But we do need to work on that, a little more diversity in terms of culturally in our programs. We don't see the need, no one is asking us yet for them. When we hear it, we accommodate it (Ivy).

With this quotation, Ivy recognizes that programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre is lacking in terms of cultural diversity. Newcomers who move to Burlington may be from different cultural backgrounds so it is important to ensure that there are programs and opportunities that these individuals can participate in. This relates back to policy development as they guide how programs are developed. As described in the previous chapter, consulting and partnering with local cultural organizations allows practitioners to develop programs that consider cultural preferences.

The sub-theme of *culture change* describes the process of shifting practices to one of more holistic care. Implicit in the transformation were initiatives that enhanced the culture of the Burlington Seniors' Centre, promoting the vibrancy of the older adult participants. The development of the BAAP and practitioners' insights allowed for the identification of areas for improvement, namely cultural recreation program offerings.

5.2.2 Extending welcome and personalized experiences

The sub-theme of *extending welcome and personalized experiences* describes the formal and informal processes of greeting older adults and how experiences are individualized at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Recognizing that the seniors' centre may be a new environment for some older adults, formal steps were taken to provide a sense of welcome, including tours of the centre and providing information on the range of opportunities for new members. Informally, instructors connected one-on-one with new participants and volunteers during their first few weeks.

Empathizing with the experience of older adults during their first visit to the Burlington Seniors' Centre, Ivy understood the need for older adults to choose an experience that is right for them.

> So, that day when older adults come here for the first time you see them wandering the halls, looking at all of the different rooms. They are sometimes alone, so the alone piece is what we want to fix. We usually sit down with new individuals at the centre to determine what programs or opportunities they are interested in (Ivy).

Assisting older adults in choosing an opportunity that suits their needs and interests was one way of personalizing experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Getting older adults to and from the centre was an important way of increasing access to those who may not have access to transportation, thereby providing personalized experiences. Ivy described how the Burlington Seniors' Centre offers a shuttle to get older adults to and from the centre.

> As far as services go, we even offer, if somebody can't get to a program and their car might have broken down or something else, we offer a shuttle to get you here (Ivy).

Offering a shuttle to and from the centre allows equal access to some older adults who rely on public transportation and those who have mobility issues. The City of Burlington transit department offers "Handi-Van", a door-to-door service for those with disabilities (City of Burlington, 2017). Handi-Van riders must be approved for transportation and it costs the same as public transportation (e.g. buses).

Ann explained that extending a welcome to participants upon coming to the Burlington Seniors' Centre was a way for practitioners and instructors to provide a platform to honour individual choice and build relationships among staff and participants. When older adults first come to the centre, they are greeted by front desk volunteers. Ann explains;

> Anyone new coming to the centre, the front desk is usually where they end up and the volunteers at the front desk do an amazing job of making anyone feel welcome. They give them a tour and I've seen them on a tour and saying 'hi' to so and so in the hall and

introducing the new person to them. So, it's a very warm personal experience with the new person that comes in. I think because we have that volunteer touch at the desk (Ann).

The front desk volunteers play a large role in greeting new individuals and encouraging them to participate in the different opportunities offered at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. As described by Ann, the front desk volunteers are responsible for giving these individuals a tour of the centre and answering any inquiries that they may have.

According to Claire, developing a relationship with the front desk volunteers was an important way to make these individuals feel welcome, and to get important information. Since front desk volunteers are the first point of contact for newcomers to the centre, they often get suggestions from customers. It is important for practitioners to build relationships so that the volunteers feel comfortable in sharing information that can affect recreation programs or volunteering.

> Staff to our participants and staff to volunteers are huge relationships that develop because we see them so frequently, and we see them as equals. We talk to them with respect and age-appropriate interactions. We laugh with them and joke about sex and other things. All the things that you would do (with limits) with a team of coworkers, and they find that relationship important (Claire).

The practitioners described the range of recreation and volunteer opportunities that were available to older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The diverse opportunities allow older adults to find something that suits their personal interests and needs.

> Here at the centre, we have something for everyone. I think the variety of programs that we offer, you can find what suits who you are, and then find your people there (Ann).

> There's nothing that we don't have, that's where I always start. Somebody comes in and they want to do something. You name it, we have it. I mean we have everything from movement to non-movement programs (Ivy).

> And then the programs themselves are so diverse and they bring different interest groups in (Claire).

These quotations illustrate that older adults can find a recreation program or volunteer

program that satisfies both their interests and needs. By choosing and participating in a program

that is relevant to their interests, older adults can find other participants who share common

interests, allowing them to feel welcomed. Ivy's quotation represents a tension with her previous

comment regarding the lack of cultural programs. The above quote illustrates how she would

market to a new participant who is interested in becoming involved at the Burlington Seniors'

Centre, which goes back to how activities are promoted in the promotional materials. Ivy's

earlier quote about the lack of inclusive programs (e.g. both physical and cultural) illustrates that

there is room for improvement to develop new recreation programs for cultural enclaves which

can reach new members of the Burlington community that were not addressed previously. This

example illustrates how the centre advocates for inclusion, but in aiming to create a space for

vitality and fighting aging, potentially fosters exclusion among those who may not see

themselves in fitting with this image.

Recreation programs and volunteer opportunities allow older adults to develop

friendships. The camaraderie among peers developed into significant relationships for some

older adults. Claire talked about how some friendships transitioned into romantic relationships.

> The other benefit, which I didn't expect, was that participants would develop romantic
> relationships. As individuals' age, the whole partnering, and personal relationships are so
> key. And they meet while they are volunteering here, they meet while they are enjoying
> classes together here. It's just a lovely thing to see. We have a lot of love affairs that
> we've seen blossom, and that's just fantastic. We have also heard of suggestions to
> include programs for widows/widowers (Claire).

Romantic relationships allow older adults to participate in recreation programs and

volunteer with their partner. This a form of social support that extends outside of the context of

the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Brianna's example of dating Roger, and specifically them

moving in together as discussed in the next chapter illustrates the significance of welcoming friendships and what they can lead to.

Other significant relationships include participants and instructors as they work to create a welcoming environment. Older adults enjoyed the consistency of program instructors that carried on from session to session. Ivy described how the older adult participants of recreation programs are dedicated to their instructor and will continue to come to the program as long as the same instructor is teaching it.

> Significant relationships include friendships between instructors and participants. The participants follow the instructors around. If a certain instructor is not teaching a certain program, they don't want to do it. Instructors are also very capable for modifying programs for those individuals who require it (Ivy).

Both Claire and Ivy understand that practitioners and instructors play an important role in making older adults feel comfortable with their participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Creating a welcoming and supportive environment is also accomplished by providing personalized experiences. Some older adults wanted to volunteer at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and continue in roles that were similar to their career, while others wanted to try something new. These individuals also have different abilities and skills that need to be recognized. Ivy commented on the importance of having conversations with prospective volunteers to find out where they would fit best.

> They will give their background and then I might have a better idea of where they would fit best and offer them a position there. Or based on their mobility, they will let me know of some issues that they may have, either physically or intellectually, and then they will direct me to where they may be better utilized (Ivy).

Program instructors can personalize experiences for their participants based on personal ability and other needs. Jamie describes both adaptations and modifications made by instructors.

The instructors are very capable of creating modifications for you if you need them. The instructors are capable of adapting their program so that it is meeting the majority of the people's needs who are attending these programs (Jamie).

Extending welcome and personalized experiences highlighted practitioners' insight into providing comfortable participation for older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Developing relationships and having conversations with older adults allows the practitioners to understand their interests and helps them to find a recreation program or volunteer opportunity that best suits their needs. These insights enhance our understanding of how recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. As is explored next, community building can extend outside of the physical building of the seniors' centre through networking with community partners and other municipalities.

5.2.3 Maintaining connections with community partners

Maintaining connections with community partners describes the process of engaging with other members of the community who are not currently involved with the Burlington Seniors' Centre. As discussed by practitioners, there were a few instances of building connections with the outside community through outreach initiatives. However, the availability of internal opportunities and programs served to redirect the outside community in coming to the centre.

Attempts at making connections with the broader community often resulted in the individual or organization coming to the centre to establish a relationship. For instance, an individual wants to develop a new recreation program (e.g. square dancing) that hasn't already been implemented at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Jamie explains:

> We met and he was like, 'we know that there are dance classes that happen at the centre, but you don't offer square dancing. How can we get this to happen here? What would the steps be?' I came up with a couple of workshops that happened once a month, so we could gage what the level of interest was. This way, we could see if it would be viable for that to be something that happened regularly, or does it make sense to run it as a workshop type of program? (Jamie).

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Ivy also discussed how the recreation practitioners were more than willing to try out new and different recreation program ideas that community members brought to the centre.

> We also do trial one days, so we will try out for example, Scottish Highland dancing, which we had, and we will do some one-off classes, brought to us by a community partner. If it is popular, we may implement a program, but other times we will just try it in a workshop format. We want to keep people moving and engaged. We will try it out, it doesn't hurt to try (Ivy).

Older adults from the Burlington community are encouraged to approach the recreation practitioners with any program ideas that they have. This allows for a working relationship with community partners and the development of workshops and programs in capacities that are not currently filled. This method of recreation program development can be used to develop cultural programs by partnering with local cultural organizations.

Community members and local businesses are also connected to the Burlington Seniors' Centre by renting out facility spaces to run their own programs or events. The practitioners talked about this type of working relationship.

> External community businesses may have a program or rent a space, so we advertise for them. They may offer a fitness program or something that we don't have. So, it's up to them to rent the space and run the program, but we will help advertise and suggest that people try it (Ivy).

> We don't have any more than a rental contract with some of these folks. We rent the space and make sure that it's clean and what they're looking for. But they are creating their own sense of community with their own like-minded individuals (Claire).

Working relationships with community members and local businesses can range from the creation of new recreation programs to simply renting out facility spaces. These relationships offer the potential for the seniors' centre to make additional income by renting out facilities and attracting more people to participate in opportunities.

Connecting with community partners can also take the form of researching best practices and trends and seeing what is going on in other municipalities. Jamie describes how outreach is an effective way to understand recent interests and training opportunities.

> OEACO [listserv for older adult community organizations] is a great resource. The other place that I connect with is the Centre for Healthy Aging in London through Western University. They provide a lot of updated certifications for instructors. CanFit Pro is a larger agency, so a lot of those bigger connections there as well (Jamie).

Connections with other municipalities was another way of understanding new trends in recreation for older adults. Ivy explains the importance of networking.

> It's mostly conference information and connections with OEACO, so it's networking. Also, seeing what other municipalities are doing and seeing if it fits within this municipality (Ivy).

Connecting with other municipalities and organizations to share information allows networks to be developed. Practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre can then implement this knowledge and information into practice through the updated training of instructors and new programs to be developed.

Day trips (e.g. musicals in Toronto, art museums) organized through the Burlington Seniors' Centre present an opportunity to engage older adults to the broader community. Claire explained the number of day trips offered and how relationships developed through recreation programs and volunteering have extended outside of these contexts.

> We offer around eight-day trips as well for those individuals who want to do something with their friends and go on a bus and do something fun for an entire day (Claire).

Ivy describes how there is a need for more social opportunities (e.g. day trips) as evident through suggestions from older adults. The importance of social experiences in building community will be explained further in the discussion chapter.

And more socials, people want more and more socials. There are only four of us and we do amazing in the events, but that's what they want to see more of. More day trips, more socials (Ivy).

Integrating belonging and community into daily practice was essential to how community was built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Encouraging program ideas from older adults and having personal conversations with volunteers allows for them to feel comfortable. The relationships that participants developed through recreation programs and volunteering extend outside of the Burlington Seniors' Centre as seen with day trips, introducing them to the broader community. These insights enhance our understanding of how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and how it extends outside of the physical building.

5.3 Building community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre Summary

Considering how recreation programs and volunteer opportunities are structured is fundamental to developing an understanding of how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For recreation practitioners, the evolving initiatives from the Burlington Active Aging Plan include standardizing program structure and instruction to create uniform experiences for older adults. However, any changes being made to recreation programs (e.g. change in day/time) need to be communicated far in advance, as practitioners recognize the importance of consistency in program experiences for older adults. Acknowledging that older adults are vibrant individuals, providing personalized experiences through program adaptations, and fostering relationships through networking and conversations strengthen community building. Below is a summary table of the building community findings. Getting a sense of the recreation program and volunteer experiences of older adults is central to our understanding of how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community. The following chapter brings together the findings from interviews with the older adult participants.

5.3.1 Building community findings summary table

Theme	Sub-theme(s)	Brief description
Structuring experiences	-Contributing decisions to structuring experiences -Instructional resources -Consistent program instruction	-Practitioners believe that standardizing recreation programs (e.g. lesson plans) contributes to enhanced experiences for the older adult participants
Integrating belonging and community into daily practice	-Culture change -Extending welcome and personalized experiences -Maintaining connections with community partners	-Describes commitment of recreation practitioners to develop relationships with older adult participants and the local community

Table 4: Building community findings summary

Chapter 6: Experiencing Community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre

6.0 Introduction

Understanding the lived experiences of older adult participants is central to understanding how community is built at a municipally-run seniors' centre. These experiences include why older adults enroll in recreation programs, get involved in volunteering, as well as their experiences when they participate. This chapter presents the results of my analysis of interviews with older adult participants at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Participants are drawn to the Burlington Seniors' Centre because of the opportunities for socialization, with recreation programs and volunteering being considered a vehicle to meet people. However, older adults also participate in programs and volunteering for various other reasons. These include getting a sense of purpose, improving while aging, and developing new connections in their community. Hence, this chapter is divided into three themes; *shared experiences lead to caring relationships*, *value derived from participation*, and *community experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.* Through these sub-themes, I develop a nuanced understanding of research question two: *what meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?*

6.1 Shared experiences lead to caring relationships

The theme *shared experiences lead to caring relationships* describes how, with time, people develop relationships inside and outside the building of the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Social connections impact the experiences of older adults in different ways. Participants strengthen existing connections and foster new relationships through their recreation program and volunteer participation. *Shared experiences lead to caring relationships* has two sub-themes: *importance of social connections* and *expanding social connections*.

6.1.1 Importance of social connections

Importance of social connections speaks to the value that socialization can have for older adults' recreation program and volunteer participation. This sub-theme also discusses how participants got involved at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Many of the older adult participants had family that do not live in Burlington, so this diminished their social circle. Rebuilding the individual's social circle became a primary rationale for getting involved at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For Alix, her daughters live in Kingston and Edmonton, so she wanted to become involved in the community to fill that social circle gap in her life.

> The Kingston family come down; we see them 2-3 times a year. And then the same with the family in Edmonton. That one is a bit more difficult. We try to interact at least twice a year. It's an expensive proposition, to fly across the country. That is why I chose to join some programs at the centre. To fill that gap when I can't see my family (Alix).

Brianna also credits her daughter with exposing her to the volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> Okay, I have a daughter and two grandkids who live here in Burlington. I moved here almost two years ago, didn't know a soul except for them and thought I must do something. I wanted to meet people and they helped me figure out that this centre was the best place (Brianna).

For Brianna, her family's recommendation of the Burlington Seniors' Centre represents a subtle, yet effective influence towards getting involved. Brianna met her current boyfriend while volunteering in the kitchen at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and they are now in the process of moving in together.

> I am going out with Eric (pseudonym) who also volunteers here. Eric and I met here in the kitchen; he does dishes. Anyways, we just started talking. In September I was going down to Niagara Falls and asked him if he wanted to come with me. He said yes, and as we were driving back, we were just talking and I said, 'let's see where this thing goes.' So, I am in the process of moving in with him (Brianna).

Family connections and recommendations represent one of the ways that older adults become involved in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. As seen with Brianna, a simple recommendation resulted in a significant relationship in her life.

Couples are also attracted to recreation programs as an activity they can do together, but also enjoy engaging in programs independently. Louise describes her experience in a dancing program with her husband compared to other programs they do on their own.

> He came dancing for 5-6 years with me and he kept saying in his mind, 'left' while he was stomping his right foot. He was a beginner but became quite good. And he came down for photography and bridge and those were things that he did without me. Luckily, I love dancing on my own so whether he's there or not didn't make much difference to me. I was able to make friends in the program without him (Louise).

Louise's example illustrates that the diverse recreation programs offer couples an opportunity to participate together as well as opportunities to take up personal interests and participate on their own.

Friends also influence participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For Grace, her connections with a support group led her to volunteer at the Bistro.

> Well, I've been in Burlington for three years now. When I first moved here, I joined a group called the 'Newcomers group'. So, it was a really good way to make new friends and meet a lot of people who were around the same age as me. I was pleased with the suggestions for volunteer opportunities that they provided me with, including at the Burlington Seniors' Centre (Grace).

Moreover, Linda's friends and a volunteer information night influenced her to get involved with volunteering at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> I must admit, I didn't know a lot about this place. I don't live very far away but it wasn't 'in my world' shall I say. There was a luncheon about attracting volunteers, so my friend and I came. The volunteer coordinator asked where I would like to work and I told him, 'there is nothing that is not on my radar. Everything is important and everything needs to

be done'. After a conversation and suggestion from my friend, I was the new volunteer in the Bistro at the Burlington Seniors' Centre (Linda).

Thus, Linda and her friend joined the Burlington Seniors' Centre based on their desire to become involved and after receiving recommendations from a volunteer coordinator. In these examples, the older adults' experiences were shaped by existing social connections.

Retirement also played a role in shaping older adults' involvement at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Barney describes how he has been able to follow up on interests he had while working.

> When you retire, you are afforded the time to follow interesting things, and you wonder why that is. You can take a day off to research just because that is a wonderful part of retirement. I think that when you retire, your lifestyle changes, so it's very important to keep social contact with people, otherwise you can get old very quickly (Barney).

Barney's quote illustrates the change in one's social circle after retirement. By getting involved in recreation programs, Barney values the importance of being social and making new friends.

Friends and family members influence some older adult participants to get involved in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Family members who have lived in Burlington for a long time are aware of available opportunities for their older adult relative who is moving to Burlington. Retirement also presents life changes regarding social circles, so personal motivations to build relationships are important. These findings illustrate how social connections influence the decisions of older adults to get involved in the centre. Next, I will address how participants value expanding their social connections through their recreation program and volunteer experiences.

6.1.2 Expanding social connections

The sub-theme *expanding social connections* illustrates how older adults value opportunities to meet new people and develop their social circle. By joining recreation programs and volunteering at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, older adults are able to engage in shared experiences with others. Newcomers to Burlington value expanding their social networks through joining the centre. Furthermore, older adults participate in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities in part, to meet new people. These contexts will be discussed to demonstrate how socializing and increasing one's social connections contribute to the meanings that older adults associate with their participation and how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Several participants are new to Burlington and therefore lack local social networks. These participants were drawn to volunteering based on its reputation as a social opportunity. Brianna, who has lived in Burlington for three years, says volunteering allowed her to meet new people.

> But I came down here and talked to the person at the front desk who gave me a tour. At that point, I wasn't ready to do the courses or anything. It was a place for me to meet people and with my volunteer background, they just grabbed me for the Bistro. I said sure, I could come in. And that's what drew me initially, was to meet people. I have met many people (Brianna).

As briefly mentioned previously, Grace joined a 'Newcomers to Burlington' group. This group allowed Grace to become familiar and involved in volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Through her volunteer experience, Grace explained how she acts as a social outlet for older adults who frequent the Bistro.

> The best part is getting to interact with the seniors' and getting to know them personally. They share things with you, little stories, and little bits of the past. Or they tell me about hardships that they may be going through. Some of them have physical struggles, mental struggles. Maybe the family is far away, or they just lost their partner of many years. Just being there, listening and giving hugs. Sometimes you're the only person all day that has held their hand or hugged them, and it just makes a difference (Grace).

Volunteering provides an opportunity for newcomers in Burlington to become involved at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. This also allows older adults to expand their social networks and meet new people.

Recreation programs represent another opportunity to socialize at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Louise discussed how participation in recreation programs enriches her social life.

> But you just get chatting when you're seeing each other two times a week. Even in Pilates, there's a camaraderie and sometimes we are laughing on the mat and things like that. It's just a good social feeling (Louise).

Louise also touched on how her writing and discussion groups allowed her to get to know the other participants better.

> The other writing group, you could just bring in your writing. And then, honest to god, the discussion that goes on in the second group there. Three or four of them are men, and whatever comes up, there's no critique. Whatever thoughts come up from what you've written, the whole group just explodes and talks (Louise).

With observations in recreation programs, I learned that participants grew to appreciate one another and share personal stories once they felt comfortable with one another. This was evident in one of the pottery observations, with an excerpt from my fieldnote below.

<p style="text-align:center">Pottery—01/16/2019</p>

> There was a nice interaction between two participants, Judy and Lisa (pseudonyms). Judy told us both that this was a special day for her because she had her brain tumour removed 20 years ago. Lisa was able to relate to Judy's experience because her daughter got a brain tumour removed 5 years ago. This showed a unique connection between the participants, but a bond, nonetheless.

I was fortunate to be in the pottery workroom to witness this interaction. I had been a part of the conversation with the two ladies, so I found it wonderful that both Judy and Lisa felt comfortable in sharing their personal experiences with me.

Barney recognizes that bringing people together with common interests will initiate socialising.

> I think the catalyst of bringing people together is common interests. Once you've got that, the social side flows from it. You go to lunch with people in classes here. The nucleus is that we have a common interest (Barney).

Participating in recreation programs with people who share the same interests presents ample social opportunities. The social side that is a result of these shared interests can transcend the boundaries of the recreation program, as seen with Barney's example of getting lunch with other participants.

Socialising and relationships developed in programs may, in some instances, be the result of how an instructor structures their class. Treacle reflected on participants in his class and how their relationship has evolved.

> A lot of people meet others for the first time when they come here for classes. I have three ladies specifically, now it's ten ladies that are all best buds. They came to my class and with group exercises, they engaged in more conversations and their relationship became stronger. They get together for dinner and lunches; they get together to go to theatres and musicals when at first, they never knew each other at all (Treacle).

With Treacle's example, it was clear that instructors play a role in facilitating social opportunities with the structure of their recreation programs. Group exercises and conversations with other participants allow older adults to expand their social networks.

Strengthening and expanding social connections is an important consideration for older adult participants, program instructors, and recreation practitioners. For newcomers to the City of Burlington, recreation programs and volunteering provide a needed social outlet for integrating into their local community. Social connections enhance the experience of older adults and provide new relationships that extend outside of programs, contributing to community building. Next, the value older adults place on their participation in recreation programs and volunteer

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opportunities is discussed. This discussion further expands our understanding of the experiences of older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

6.2 Value derived from participation

Value derived from participation speaks to the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Specifically, older adults connect skill development with enjoyment in a group environment, thereby enhancing their program experiences in a community. Also, participants focus on the instruction and facilitation of programs and volunteer opportunities. *Value derived from participation* has three sub-themes: *acquiring skills and improving while aging*, *quality of program instructors*, and *balancing instructional and social aspects*.

6.2.1 Acquiring skills and improving while aging

The sub-theme *acquiring skills and improving while aging* describes how older adults value learning something new and improving their well-being while maintaining their independence. Louise, a participant in a writing class, links an experience of sharing a story with her perceived ability.

> I could not believe how they responded to my writing. I have never felt so empowered or enriched because I did not believe it was any good. But to get that reaction from someone, from that moment on, I've been writing (Louise).

This reaction from more experienced writers, as well as personally recognizing her ability, shape's Louise's experience in this program. Louise also talked about her experience in the Pilates program.

> I like Pilates. It gives me a sense that I'm sort of able to fight aging. When I first started Pilates, she would say 'tighten your abs'. I didn't know what she was talking about, I didn't know where my abs were. Well, now I do. It gives a great deal of satisfaction to feel that you're improving as you're aging (Louise).

Louise associates her experience of improving her well-being while aging as important to her program satisfaction. Although it is unclear if this perspective extends beyond Louise, it does provide insights into why participants emphasize acquiring skills for various reasons.

New participants also recall personal motivations for acquiring new skills. Alix shares why she decided to learn to play the fiddle.

> I've always wanted to play the fiddle or have a go at it. It might be because, in the UK, they are a bit more music-minded over there where my family lives. My sister plays the piano quite well and both of her daughters play the violin. So, I figured I would give it a shot so it would give me something to talk about with them (Alix).

Alix also values improving her skills. Namely, Alix connects her increased participation to her self-improvement in the fiddle program.

> To get a hobby that you can absorb yourself in so you're not thinking about anything else. You can focus on the instrument. The first time one of my tunes sounded alright on the fiddle was a standout experience because it showed that my practice was paying off (Alix).

Alix values learning how to play a musical instrument to better connect with her family and practicing frequently to achieve a good sound.

Concern for family member's health was detailed by several older adults. Louise discussed how her husband once participated in line dancing classes at the centre but stopped because he wasn't enjoying it anymore.

> I think he should [join again], because it was good for him, for the physical activity. On his own, he doesn't get out much. Unless my daughter has us take her dog; he will walk the dog, but other than that, not much. You worry a bit but it's up to him. I can't do it myself (Louise).

This quotation speaks to the personal experience of wellbeing. Louise is concerned for her husband, but he has to be the one that chooses to participate, she can't force him to exercise.

Although concern for family member's well-being was discussed as important, independence was as well. Louise described how both she and her husband are retired and how

spending every minute together would affect their relationship. Participation in recreation

programs at the centre away from him gives them something to talk about.

> My husband is retired as well, I must bring this in. So, what am I going to do? Sit around with him all day? If I didn't get out, it would drive me crazy. I guess come couples do a lot together, but I could not bear it on a day to day basis, day in and day out. Coming here, it gives you the sense that you have your own life. I think we are independent people actually (Louise).

Linked to the notion of improvement, some participants were critical of certain aspects of

their program instruction. These complaints involved their personal preferences for learning new

skills. For example, Brianna discussed her frustration in learning how to speak Spanish.

> Honestly, I did try the Spanish because my girlfriend's boyfriend is Spanish, so I thought I better learn something. But I found it difficult because it was the beginner's class, but most of the people had taken it three times. That is not a beginner's class. They need a class for people that it is their first year doing it. I just dropped out because I couldn't keep up with them (Brianna).

Brianna also questioned the amount of feedback new participants receive during

programs.

> This one guy sitting next to me was nice. He gave me this app and told me to use it on my phone. I was not here to use an app; I was here to listen to my teacher. They need something that is for beginner's, not doing it your third or fourth time (Brianna).

Here Brianna discussed the need for more instruction and feedback for new participants if

they are joining a class that has repeat participants. This creates a tension with instruction and

participation at the seniors' centre. The next theme will provide detail on how older adult

recreation program participants are committed to their instructors and will follow them from one

program session (e.g. fall) to the next (e.g. winter). For new participants at the Burlington

Seniors' Centre, this has the potential of making them uncomfortable if they do not understand

an inside-joke that the instructor made, contributing to their personal feeling of being an outsider.

A group environment for acquiring new skills and improving while aging was described as important by Alix.

> As I said, there's nothing to stop me as an individual, taking lessons on my own time. But that's no fun, I like to be with a group. That's another thing about coming here. You can teach yourself a lot of things on the internet if you want to do that. For me, that's boring. I like being in a group (Alix).

Older adult participants view acquiring skills and improving while aging as important to their program and volunteer experience. Some older adults connect acquiring skills with feeling connected to other participants in the program, while others call for more learning opportunities. Additionally, the criticism some participants direct towards instructors in terms of teaching ability demonstrates that their desire to have their individual needs met. Consequently, instructors and practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre would benefit from collecting this information through participant feedback throughout each program session to make programs more receptive to differing needs. Responding to older adults' diverse needs through personalized experiences, as discussed in the previous chapter contributes to community building.

6.2.2 Quality of program instructors

The sub-theme *quality of program instructors* describes how instructors influence how older adults experience their recreation programs and volunteer positions. Some older adults speak highly of their instructors, while others describe the need for alternative teaching methods to support diverse learning styles. Participants also discuss the differences between experienced and inexperienced instructors. In this sub-theme, I will explore how the program and volunteer instructors influence older adults' experiences. These insights will broaden our understanding of the meanings that older adults associate with their participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Instructors can positively influence the program and volunteer experiences for older

adults. Louise spoke to how she was fortunate to have a quality Pilates instructor.

> I would have to say the quality of the teaching. I wouldn't have been happy with them if
> the quality was not good for Pilates. I was so fortunate to have a lovely Pilates teacher for
> the beginner class (Louise).

Participants also described the contribution that quality instructors have to the overall

functioning of the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Barney talked about his music history instructor

and the loss that the centre would suffer if something happened to him.

> His knowledge of music and art, he can go on for about two hours about Mozart and
> everybody is just sitting there open-mouthed. The most obscure musicians and arts. If
> they ever lose him, he is 70 now, it would be a huge loss for the centre. I have done pretty
> much everything with him (Barney).

With the above example, Barney believed that the instructor is crucial to the community

at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Participants enjoyed the consistency of program instructors

that carried on from session to session (e.g. Fall to Winter, Winter to Spring), and expressed their

commitment to that instructor if they were available. This commitment to an instructor highlights

both the instructor's quality of teaching and relationships with the instructor.

> Oh, yeah, the instructor is everything. You get the feeling that they like to work here.
> [Names an instructor] is, I wouldn't say she's the best line dancing teacher going or
> anything, but she does the job and it's good enough for me. It doesn't have to be perfect
> and I like the way that [Names an assistant instructor] has been included into it (Louise).

Louise appreciates how the head instructor has allowed the assistant instructor to teach

classes when she is not there, illustrating a sense of trust between the instructors. When I was

observing one of the line dancing classes, the [assistant instructor] was filling in for the [head

instructor] as she was on vacation. In previous observations of the class, I noticed that the

[assistant instructor] was nervous and messing up the steps when the [head instructor] was

watching her. With this observation when the [head instructor] was not present, the [assistant

instructor] seemed much more relaxed and the participants were encouraging and supportive of

her instruction. Alix noticed the difference in the quality of instruction when the [head instructor]

was not at the class.

> I think participants are very supportive of their instructors. It was interesting the last time
> you came to the line dancing class because the [assistant instructor] had been teaching
> what the [head instructor] had taught her. We all said the same thing; she did much better
> when the [head instructor] was not there (Alix).

Older adults' value the quality of instructors teaching style at the Burlington Seniors'

Centre. Both Louise and Alix appreciate how the [assistant instructor] can take over for the [head

instructor] when she is not present, as they are still getting quality line dancing instruction. This

example illustrates another way that instructors influence the program experiences of older

adults.

Volunteers at the Burlington Seniors' Centre talked about the quality of the Chef of the

Bistro, based on their interactions with him. As there are volunteers for different shifts, Grace

spoke to how the Chef was able to connect with each volunteer to make them feel valued.

> He has a very special way of spending time with every volunteer on their shift. It doesn't
> matter how much he has to do and how much he has to get prepared. He will find time to
> help the person on dishes, help the person on cash, or talk to them for a little bit (Grace).

Brianna spoke to a similar experience of volunteering for Roger [pseudonym], and how

this engagement and support has resulted in her continued engagement at the Bistro.

> He has just supported me on so much stuff and I can talk to him about anything. He
> knows he can depend on me for different things. We will talk on the phone and we will
> talk here (Brianna).

The older adult participants also recognize the importance of diverse teaching styles and

differentiated program instruction in supporting varied learning styles. These learning

considerations influence the program experiences for older adults. For instance, Tina describes

the participants in her Current Affairs program and their varied needs.

But if you've got a subject up there and you're trying to talk about it, half of us are hearing impaired, sight impaired, some people haven't got the voice in my group. It's so hard to be heard, so they need to be quiet (Tina).

Issues between program participants and instructors were less common, but instances still occurred. When Barney expressed his disagreement with the instructor was saying in a Current Affairs class, the entire situation escalated.

One instructor was okay as a moderator but was blatantly racist underneath. I am very much against that at any level. He then started sending me pictures on the internet and that sort of thing. I reported this to management, and they got involved (Barney).

Barney goes on to explain how this issue was handled properly: "…that was brought to the management and it was taken seriously. The response by management is there." The management's response to Barney's issue illustrates their awareness to participant feedback, in this case, regarding a complaint of an instructor.

Older adults also pay attention to the diverse teaching styles of their instructors. Louise outlines the diverse teaching styles of her Pilates instructors.

So, I think what they did is they brought in two new teachers and their classes aren't as full. I have been able to get access to, for the most part, to the advanced class. It turns out, they're not bad, and they're pretty good. Getting a variety from the three of them, I think I get a little better of a workout (Louise).

Additionally, participants note the differences between experienced and inexperienced instructors in their ability to provide a commitment to the program they are teaching, and the encouragement given to the participants. This discussion illustrates what participants look for in an instructor and how high-quality instruction is important to them.

Alix criticized an inexperienced French instructor and how that affected her program experience.

So, I took a course here called Advanced French, but it wasn't so good to be quite honest. I don't wish to be critical, but I don't think the instructor took us very seriously and

didn't prepare enough for it. Sometimes I felt like I knew a little bit more than the instructor (Alix).

Some older adults discussed how they could better relate to the inexperienced instructor because they perceive a closer match between their abilities. Alix discussed repeating line dancing classes as she was a new participant and how she was able to evolve with the assistant instructor.

> I underestimated it a bit. I thought it would be easier, but there's a lot to think about. It's good to do it and be with [names the assistant instructor] because you see their involvement and the steps come much easier (Alix).

As an inexperienced instructor, the older adult participants can better identify with the [assistant instructor] skill level, which leads to enriching the program experience.

There has been a transition of volunteer instructors to City of Burlington employees. This change in staff regulations impact the volunteer instructors who worked under that role for several years.

> It's a feeling that things are being imposed. And rules that make no sense. People who have been volunteering for years, all of the teachers, had to go and be trained to be an employee for the City of Burlington (Louise).

Here, Louise described a level of bureaucracy by the recreation practitioners. She sensed that this change in rules impacted the quality of teaching and overall experience at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Older adults pay attention to the instructors who had an impact on their program experience. Participants value the contributions that instructors have to their skill development. Also, participants focus on diverse teaching styles, varying in their opinions of experienced and inexperienced instructors. Some older adults argued that inexperienced instructors cannot teach a program, while others related to the inexperienced instructors based on their skill level.

Instructors represent an important part of an older adult's experience and the meanings that they derive from their participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

6.2.3 Balancing social and instructional components

Balancing social and instructional components describes how both socialization and instruction are important to the recreation program and volunteer experiences of older adults. Participants value the socialization of programs and volunteering while others appreciate both the socialization and instruction. Tensions sometimes emerge between these components because socialization can be affected by a desire to learn and improve on skills.

Many older adults place a priority on having a social experience. For instance, Grace found that the Burlington Seniors' Centre and the volunteering opportunities both cultivate a social atmosphere.

> I volunteer at the Burlington Seniors' Centre mostly because of the friendships with my coworkers or other volunteers. You get to know them, you have some quiet times in between your shift and you get to talk about what you get to do with your day, their grandchildren, their spouse/partners, things that they're challenged with, things they are working on. You develop a friendship; you can't help it (Grace).

> Linda also described her social experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> I spend time at the Burlington Seniors' Centre because of the people. People just want to connect with somebody. The regular diners know you, they know you are going to be volunteering that day and it's a little bit of consistency in their lives which is a good thing. I get to talking with them and learn something new every day (Linda).

Linda's acknowledgement of building relationships with the patrons rather than the other volunteers speaks to the diverse social experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> Barney also values the social culture in the recreation programs that he is a part of.

> By meeting with people that have common interests, you have something to talk about as soon as you meet. The more you meet, the more you learn about them outside of those common interests. I think the thing is you are meeting people who have the same interests and therefore they may have similar interests on other things in life (Barney).

Here Barney emphasizes that the people who are participating in the same recreation program have some interest in common (e.g. the course content). However, by having further conversations, the participants may also have other common interests.

Participants appreciate a balance between the recreation program instruction and outside program socializing elements. For example, Tina values these two components equally.

> Sitting around while enjoying coffee and snacks and talking with the participants after the first hour is enjoyable. I'm here to lead a current affairs class, so I enjoy the discussion that goes on, but also value socialization. Our class is different. The reason is that we have lunch in the room, and we are just in the room. The next-door group, they go and line up to get lunch. Who are you going to sit with and talk? See, we don't have that problem (Tina).

Both instructional and social aspects mutually enhance Tina's recreation program experience.

Some participants shift their thinking about social and instructional components over time. While Alix started her line dancing program experience in search of instructional opportunities, she grew to also value the socialization aspects.

> The instruction was great, but at the beginning, I would consider the other participants to be acquaintances. Over time you get to know each other and talk a bit more, exchange a bit more news. Now we go to monthly lunches (Alix).

Instructional and social components are viewed differently by the participants. While some participants value one aspect over the other, both influence program and volunteer experiences of older adults. These components must be targeted by instructors and practitioners to ensure quality programs.

Participants value acquiring skills in recreation programs and volunteer positions and improving those skills while aging. The program and volunteer instructors play a vital role in this process, and older adults discussed their varying opinions of the instructors. Balancing instructional and social components of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities is an

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important consideration for instructors and practitioners for future opportunities. Next, the experiences of community will be described next.

6.3 Community experiences within a seniors' centre

Community experiences within a seniors' centre speak to older adults' experiences to date and how they thrived or struggled with the idea of community within a seniors' centre. Many participants describe developing a strong sense of membership and belonging to their recreation program, volunteer position and seniors' centre. However, others encounter constraints to community, thus presenting a contested aspect of the experience of older adults. *Community experiences within a seniors' centre* has two sub-themes: *appreciating membership and belonging* and *constraints to developing friendships*.

6.3.1 Appreciating membership and belonging

Appreciating membership and belonging describes the strong feelings that older adults associated with the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For some, this sense of membership emerges months into participation in a recreation program or volunteer position. These feelings enhance the experiences of older adults.

Treacle describes the Burlington Seniors Centre as a comfortable environment where he feels understood.

> The Burlington Seniors' Centre is an amazing place. I love the programs that are here, I love the people that teach the programs, and I love the people who come here to take the programs. I can't go through the hall from one end to the other any day without at least half a dozen people saying 'hello'. It is, of course, the people that make a difference. The people treat me in such a way, and I feel completely understood (Treacle).

Linda details a similar experience of the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

> You don't have to know anybody to go on the trips because you will meet somebody on the bus. It is a nice community, it's not like a community of a very small town, you don't know everybody, but here it is up to you. It is a safe community that you can get to know (Linda).

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Participants also connect their sense of membership and belonging to the vibrancy of the seniors' centre. Louise explains how the vibrancy of the Burlington Seniors' Centre defies stereotypes.

> If ever there is a place that puts to rest the stereotype of a senior, it's this place. It is this place because, you know, I think there are places where seniors' can go where there's a lot more walkers and a lot more feebleness. In this place, some people are healthy, in good spirits, and the atmosphere is fantastic (Louise).

As seen here, Louise identifies with being a vibrant older adult, and the positive atmosphere influences her participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. However, this quote excludes older adults who use walkers and other assistive devices (e.g. hearing aids) to get involved at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Grace also touched on the vivacity of older adults.

> Just about the progression of aging, and I hope I can be as graceful, energetic and positive. There are little bits and I just admire them and how they're still smiling and working hard to stimulate their life in programs and social groups. I don't just want to stay home and read and knit. I want to be out there (Grace).

The City of Burlington defines older adults as those individuals aged 55 years and older. Grace had recently turned 55 and here she was talking about how she would like to be apart of the vibrant community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre as she gets older.

Some participants mentioned how the relationships developed at the centre extended out into the community. For example, Barney goes to weekly dinners with other participants from the recreation program at the centre.

> You get really close to each other after a few sessions. It's amazing, we all care about each other, which is wonderful. We would meet every Friday and get together outside of the centre as well, lunch and that type of thing (Barney).

Breaking the centre walls into community is illustrated by participants getting together and enjoying something else outside of the centre. For Barney and other participants, this took

the form of weekly dinners, allowing the participants to get to know one another better, strengthening their feelings of community.

Several older adults attribute a strong sense of belonging to their recreation program and volunteer position. The opportunities present through recreation programs and volunteering as well as the vibrancy of the participants shape these feelings at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These insights enhance our understanding of how participants view themselves as seniors' centre members first and participants second, contributing to a strong sense of community.

6.3.2 Constraints to developing relationships

Constraints to developing relationships describe the impact of health and subjective concerns to create relationships and become involved in the community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The underlying impact of personal health concerns was raised in several interviews. Some of the older adult participants were experiencing personal constraints to developing relationships while others witnessed these limitations.

For Grace, she engaged with regular diners at the Bistro when volunteering. In the interview, she referred to one gentleman who has struggled with health issues recently.

> He is in constant pain and he doesn't look well. Things have changed about his personal appearance. His Depends shows now and he used to be in nice clothes. Now they are baggy because he doesn't eat as much, and it's sad. He used to have his own place but now he's in a home, so we don't see him as much (Grace).

The transition from living independently to an institutionalized care facility and physical limitations have the potential to affect social participation. In the quotation above, Grace referred to another person's "decline" as "sad". For those individuals that experience age-related changes, they can be better supported by targeting the attitudes that keep people from engaging in recreation programs (King, 2001). Practitioners can highlight the benefits of perceiving the upcoming years as a time for opportunity and growth, thereby challenging ageist perspectives.

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Grace also described how a regular diner has developed an early onset of dementia.

> We also have some people that I like to help who I now know have dementia. They buy their lunch and they walk out the door, and they didn't get their lunch. Every time they come in, they are getting thinner, so now I make sure that all the girls know that this person buys their lunch and never eats it (Grace).

Grace discussed two important constraints to relationship development: physical limitations and memory loss. Although Grace was not experiencing these constraints herself, she was aware that some older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre were going through those challenges.

Personal constraints to participating fully at the Burlington Seniors' Centre was of interest. Alix is a caregiver to her husband, and this affects her ability to participate in more than one recreation program at a time.

> I lonely participated in more than one thing at a time. I have my husband at home so I can't get too involved (Alix).

Participants sometimes get together after their programs to get a snack from the Bistro and socialize. Since Alix has to get home to her husband, she often misses out on these opportunities thereby affecting relationships developed at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

Some participants recalled their personal experiences of isolation and how this affected their ability to develop relationships. Linda discussed her struggle with depression.

> Isolation is not necessarily for older people, but you do know that as you get older, things do happen to you. I think as you get older, you have to be careful. You can get lonelier because your social world does get smaller. I suffer from depression and want to use it in the most positive way that I can. That is why I volunteer (Linda).

In this example, Linda appears to be aware of her personal circumstances for not being more involved at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Linda's worries of isolation speak to a significant participation barrier for some older adults.

Physical challenges, memory loss and isolation are all important considerations for how older adults face a barrier to participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These concerns may influence both the current and future recreation program participants and volunteers, inhibiting the experience of community for older adults, and will be described in more detail in the discussion chapter.

6.4 Overall experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre

Getting a sense of the experiences of recreation program participants and volunteers is central to developing an understanding of how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For older adults, these experiences involve social, instructional, and community considerations. Social considerations shape how and why older adults get involved in the recreation program and volunteer experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Additionally, improving while aging through skill development and perceived sense of community contribute to developing a nuanced understanding of experiences of participants. These sub-themes also illustrate how older adults rely on instructors and other participants to enrich these experiences. A summary of the findings from this chapter are provided in a table format below. Although the findings in both thematic chapters were divided into five main themes, intersections and connections exist that are important to recognize. These connections and intersections are addressed in the following discussion chapter to foster a deeper understanding of how community is built at a municipally-run seniors' centre.

6.4.1 Experiencing community findings summary table

Theme	Sub-theme(s)	Brief description
Shared experiences lead to caring relationships	-Importance of social connections -Expanding social connections	-Describes how, with time, older adults develop relationships at the BSC
Value derived from participation	-Acquiring skills and improving while aging -Quality of program instructors -Balancing social and instructional components	-Speaks to the meanings that older adults associate with their participation at the BSC
Community experiences within a seniors' centre	-Appreciating membership and belonging -Constraints to developing relationships	-Describes older adults experiences of community and personal experiences of constraints to feelings of community

Table 3: Experiencing community findings summary

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.0 Introduction

The study of community building in seniors' centres offers many important insights. These insights inform our understanding of the breadth and depth of operations and experiences in seniors' centres, as well as recreation programs and volunteer opportunities for older adults. As outlined in the two data presentation chapters, insights include experiential and developmental components. In summary, participants highlighted the importance of social connections, improving while aging, and experiences of community. Moreover, recreation programs are becoming increasingly structured at the seniors' centre, and there is a culture change to integrate belonging and community into daily practice. Relatedly, and as is explained in depth below, the study contributes to three areas of academic literature: (1) community building, (2) the experiences of older adults in seniors' centres, (3) organizational capacity in municipal recreation. This chapter is divided into three sections that highlight the new understandings generated from this study: community building, seniors' centre experiences, and organizational capacity.

7.1 Community Building

The main purpose of this study was to understand how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants. This will be explored through two different perspectives: the attachment to the Burlington Seniors' Centre through recreation program and volunteer participation, and the constraints that limit feelings of community being built. These perspectives have been developed from the findings of the thesis, bringing together the older adult and recreation practitioners' perspectives. These findings enhance our understanding of

older adults' experiences of community in seniors' centres and how recreation practitioners can improve their practices in municipal recreation contexts.

7.1.1 Community Attachment

Older adult participants highlighted the importance of community attachment in their recreation program and volunteer experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The association between community attachment and older adults has been well documented in the literature (Rowles & Bernard, 2013). Two important factors relate to older adults' community attachment: opportunities for social connections and availability of services (Buffel, De Donder, Phillipson, De Witte, Dury, & Verte, 2014). For example, Brianna moved to Burlington two years ago and started volunteering at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Brianna feels attached to the Bistro chef and other volunteers and that is what keeps her returning to the centre. Similarly, Grace explained how she started with one shift per week for volunteering and now she volunteers every day. These findings mirror the work of Lancee and Radl (2002), who explored the relationship between commitment to social connections in volunteer roles. These insights enhance our understanding of older adults' community attachment to seniors' centres, specifically, in a volunteer capacity. Additional research is needed to understand the relationships between volunteers and their instructors at seniors' centres, and if the relationship transcends volunteer spaces.

7.1.2 Constraints to community building

On-going tensions with staff and policies were significant to the understanding of how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community. Initially, volunteers could lead classes, but with the implementation of the Burlington Active Aging Plan, practitioners decided to transition volunteer instructors to City of Burlington employees. The practitioners believed this was

beneficial as everyone would be under the same umbrella for policies and procedures, some older adult participants believed that rules were being imposed without being grandfathered in. For example, Louise discussed her disdain regarding the level of bureaucracy that she believed was being imposed. This ultimately impacted her experiences in recreation programs. This finding relates to repositioning research by Kaczynski, Havitz, and McCarville (2005) as any changes need to have the support of stakeholders. Additional research is needed to understand how culture change initiatives in municipal recreation contexts impact the experiences of older adults.

Like research by Hutchinson and Gallant (2016), participation in seniors' centres, specifically in recreation programs or volunteering was an opportunity to be socially engaged, but also a source of frustration. In this study health challenges impacted feelings of community for some older adults as they had to deal with those complications away from the centre, thus impacting relationships with other program participants. Hallam et al. (2012) found that cognitive abilities greatly affect relationships in recreation programs. Although no participants in my study reflected on their personal cognitive impairments, Grace spoke about a man that eats at the Bistro and who has recently developed early-onset dementia. This represents an area for future research as there remains a need to better understand how recreation practitioners and seniors' centres can support individuals who have recently developed cognitive impairments.

Some participants reflected on experiences of social isolation and loneliness that impacted their experiences of community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. While these experiences may be related to relationships outside of the seniors' centre (i.e. with family), it may suggest that some older adults are lonely in a crowd (Newall & Menec, 2019). Further research is needed to explore the potential discrepancy between the number of relationships (i.e.

engagement with other seniors' centre members) and the perceived quality. Glover (2004) argues that community can be exclusionary, as non-insiders are disadvantaged when compared to insiders. This relates to recreation programs when there is a well-established cohort of participants that carry on from one program session to the next. This also applies to volunteers who work on the same shift, as an outsider may not be familiar with how those older adults work together. Although participants reported no stories of cliques or exclusionary friend groups, this could contribute to feelings of being left out and isolated (Salari, Brown, & Eaton, 2006).

Additional research is needed to examine how social dynamics at seniors' centres, for example, cliques, can impact experiences of isolation, especially for new members who are joining a recreation program for the first time. Given that seniors' centres are thought to combat social isolation and loneliness (Findlay, 2003), longitudinal studies can contribute to a better understanding of how social isolation may change with ongoing participation at a seniors' centre.

Understanding older adult experiences and program development at the Burlington Seniors' Centre contributes to the community building literature. The increased strength of relationships over time from participation in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities contributes to strong feelings of community. That said, there needs to be continued communication between recreation practitioners and older adults when changes are being implemented. As described by recreation practitioners, any changes being made to programs (e.g. day/time) need to be communicated far in advance, because consistency is important to the recreation program experiences of older adults.

7.2 The experiences of older adults in seniors' centres

Relatively little is known about the experiences of older adults at seniors' centres (Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016). This study addresses the gap by exploring the meanings of

experiences for older adult recreation program and volunteer participants in depth. Two core thematic ideas inform our understanding of these experiences: *shared experiences lead to caring relationships*, and *value derived from participation*. Each of these ideas will be explored separately, along with relevant connections, to enrich our understanding of the experiences of older adults at seniors' centres.

7.2.1 Establishing and strengthening social connections

The process of aging has been described as having an impact on one's range of social networks and continued engagement in community life (Papageoriou, Marquis, & Dare, 2016). As the data analysis made clear, social connections shape the recreation program and volunteer experiences of participants. Many older adults entered these opportunities looking to expand their social networks in a caring community, as described in the promotional materials. Family members and friends also influence older adults to come to the seniors' centre. Other older adults became a member at the centre out of their own personal interest. Recreation programs and volunteer opportunities allow older adults to strengthen existing social relationships while fostering new ones. This is mainly accomplished through snack breaks during recreation programs, volunteering during the same shift, and informal conversations. With an expansion of friendships and relationships at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, older adults were able to seek social support from fellow participants and volunteers, instructors, and practitioners. Thus, participants are continually establishing and strengthening social connections, and this came out repeatedly in the interviews, making socializing an essential component of seniors' centre experiences for older adults.

Hutchinson and Gallant (2016) suggest that seniors' centres enable older adults to manage declines in social networks, continue to be active, and be contributing members of the

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community. Similarly, previous research on older adults has indicated that friendships promote increased well-being (Pinquart & Sorenson, 2001; Roberto, Allen & Blieszner, 2001; Siu & Phillips, 2002). According to this study, older adults developed informal friendships through their recreation program and volunteer participation. For example, Treacle explained how a group of ladies met when they joined one of his classes and now, they do every class together. Similar to previous research (Aday et al., 2006; Fullbright, 2010), friendships at the seniors' centre were important, with almost everyone reporting that they made new friends since joining.

These findings can be connected to broader considerations of older adults' experiences in seniors' centres. This study provides a first step in developing an understanding of how social connections play in enriching recreation program and volunteer experiences for older adults. Namely, socialising was portrayed as a significant consideration for older adults, facilitating the meeting of new people. This is important for older adults who may have a smaller social circle. Further research is needed to better understand the types of tangible support that is exchanged between friends. For instance, studies indicate that seniors' centre participants have relied on friends for help (Fullbright, 2010). However, it is not clear from the research what that help entails or the context in which it is provided.

7.2.2 Acquiring skills and improving while aging

Alongside wanting a social experience, older adults also want to acquire new skills and improve their well-being while aging. New participants to the centre situate improving their health at the core of their recreation program and volunteer experience. For several participants, self-improvement connects to their enjoyment at the seniors' centre more broadly. This can take the form of skill development (e.g. learning exercises for abdominal muscles, perfecting a serve in Pickleball). During interviews with older adults, participants continually evaluated program

content and instructors. Participants valued new instructors as they taught new drills to enhance skills, while others valued inexperienced instructors through feeling more comfortable and relating to their lack of experience.

In this case, older adults become participants through learning and acquiring different skills in a group environment. Older adults want to be healthy, and this, in part, is why continual learning is important to them. Continual learning can take the form of skill acquisition (e.g. learning a new dance routine), and volunteering in a new role (e.g. event committee), as examples. These findings make an important contribution to existing research on continual learning and skill acquisition (MacKean & Abbot-Chapman, 2011) by outlining the importance older adults place on learning new things as they age. Additional research is required to better understand this topic, namely: (1) why was continual learning an important consideration for many older adults in this study, and (2) how can recreation programs and volunteer roles be structured to foster new learning experiences. While this study uncovered this gap, further research is required.

Independence held a complex meaning for older adults, and as presented in the previous chapter, comprised several dimensions. Many older adult participants chose to participate in recreation programs and volunteering to get a break from their daily life. For example, the older adults wanted to get away from their spouse, grandchildren and monotonous boredom. The concept of independence discussed by the older adults in this study differs somewhat from definitions used within the literature. Instead of defining independence as the absence of dependence on others; research from the areas of sociology and gerontology focus on the psychosocial variables such as attitudes, social support and political and social environments (see, for example, Williams, 1991).

For older adults in this study, independence did not signify the absence of dependence but instead meant being able to get a break from daily commitments. Some participants talked about participating in recreation programs away from their spouses, so that gave them something to talk about. Successful aging and active aging have been discussed in the literature as briefly mentioned in the literature review which relates to levels of independence. Rowe and Kahn (1997) popularized the idea of "successful aging", which describes engagement in life, high cognitive and physical function, and low disease and disability. This conceptualization of successful aging fails to capture developmental processes and changes in function over time (Stowe & Cooney, 2015). As increasingly diverse perceptions and experiences describe the aging process for older adults, we must avoid marginalizing differences and formulate inclusive conceptualizations of aging.

Nimrod and Kleiber (2007) introduce the terms of "self-reinvention innovation", which were activities that had nothing in common with the person's history, and "self-preservation innovation", described as activities that were consistent with old interests and skills (p. 10). Participants in this study fell into both categories. For example, Louise engaged in Pilates to improve her personal well-being, learning that she had abs for the first time, illustrating the self-reinvention innovation. Brianna on the other hand volunteered for years at other places (e.g. local churches) and wanted to continue volunteering at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, illustrating self-preservation innovation.

Participants described the sense of purpose they got from recreation program and volunteer participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Many older adults spoke to how participation in recreation programs and volunteering allowed them to feel wanted and needed. Both recreation program and volunteer opportunities offered at the seniors' centre allow older

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adults to have experiences that reflect their working careers or try something new. Attending the

seniors' centre enabled older adults to maintain a sense of purpose by staying active and having

scheduled commitments, allowing some individuals to maintain their consistent daily schedule.

For example, Linda talked about older adults who came to the Bistro every day for a meal to eat

with some friends. If a friend did not show up to a scheduled meeting, participants expressed

concern illustrating care for one another's well-being.

These findings can be connected to a broader consideration of seniors' centre experiences

for older adults. Independence was portrayed as a significant consideration for study participants

with recreation programs and volunteering being the perfect outlet to focus on the activity and

get a break from daily commitments. Independence contributes to the ability of older adults to

remain participating in the community (Mack, Salmoni, Viverais-Dressler, Porter, & Garg,

1997). As a previous study of seniors' centres report, these contexts provide a place for older

adults to continue being contributing members of society (Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016).

Moreover, these findings align with Meshram & O'Cass' (2013) research, in that seniors' centre

participation contributes to feelings of empowerment as older adults develop a social identity

from the programs that they are involved in. Additional research is needed to understand seniors'

centre experiences for those individuals who rely on caregivers and other support workers.

Previous research indicates that baby boomers have negative perceptions of seniors'

centres, namely being for the frail elderly (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). Some older adults felt

that this stigma associated with seniors' centres deterred people from joining. At the Burlington

Seniors' Centre, older adult participants are seen as vibrant individuals and are not treated

differently than instructors and practitioners who work at the centre. Recognizing and

demonstrating an interest in what older adults are saying makes age irrelevant in friendship and

community participation (Nocon & Pearson, 2000). Mutual respect for one another is viewed more important than age as discussed by Claire in the previous chapter. Joking about sex and other things were ways to make the volunteers comfortable and understand that they are friends with the practitioners. Mutual respect, enjoying each other's company and shared interests made chronological age irrelevant in this study.

These findings could benefit from further research of seniors' centre experiences for older adults. Namely, additional research is needed to understand effective ways of attracting baby boomers to seniors' centres. Leaders from seniors' centres in Ontario have noted concerns in reaching younger older adults, which may be related to negative stereotypes about seniors' centres programs and participants (Sheppard et al., 2016). Practitioners at seniors' centres should consider other ways to promote their diverse programming and combat stereotypes among baby boomers and older adults who perceive older adults as the frail elderly (Pardasani & Goldkind, 2012). New marketing materials (e.g. photographs showing current older adult participants at the centre being active in their programs) may be needed to attract younger older adults. Partnerships with community organizations may also help seniors' centre build their community profile and combat feelings of inactivity. Although capacity was mentioned briefly in this discussion of seniors' centre experiences, it is addressed in greater depth in the next section as issues of organizational capacity in municipal recreation are of importance.

7.3 Organizational Capacity in Municipal Recreation

Organizational capacity considerations fit into understanding how community is built at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. In this section, I discuss how recreation programs and volunteer opportunities are organized and how these insights relate to relevant literature. These ideas include how the diverse programs are structured and the relationships between various

stakeholders (e.g. participants, instructors, practitioners). Organizational capacity provides an appropriate framework to explore these considerations. Namely, this section builds on previous research of organizational capacity in municipal recreation provision (Berke, Backhurst, Day, Ericksen, Laurian, Crawford, & Dixon, 2006). In this discussion, three organizational capacity dimensions are explored using Hall et al.'s (2003) multi-dimensional framework.

Whereas community recreation researchers have examined how municipal recreation departments have employed organizational capacity broadly, I applied Hall et al's (2003) framework to how a municipally-run recreation department develops and operates programs, which will be discussed in more depth below. Throughout the study, various factors influenced provision including culture change, consistent delivery and the Burlington Active Aging Plan. Additionally, insights involve organizational capacity, namely the connections between multiple capacity dimensions (Leone, Barnes, & Sharpe, 2015).

It is important to focus on two organizational capacities to understand provision in a municipal recreation context – infrastructure and human resources. Infrastructure capacities are further divided into the relationship and network capacity and planning and development capacity (Hall et al., 2003). The following organizational capacity discussion is grounded in what various study participants reported about their experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These insights range from practitioners explaining how recreation programs are developed to the experiences of older adults who participate in the programs. These findings enhance our understanding of how organizational capacity considerations enable municipal recreation departments to implement and sustain programs.

7.3.1 Infrastructure Capacity

Infrastructure capacity involves the ability of organizations to engage with different forms of processes (Hall et al., 2003), which is important to the provision at a municipally-run seniors' centre. At the Burlington Seniors' Centre, the number of rooms available for programming is an important infrastructural consideration. The number of rooms governs the types of programs that the Burlington Seniors' Centre can operate and the size of their membership. While the seniors' centre has an infrastructure capacity across ten program rooms, space still exists for other initiatives at the centre.

Insights emerge from this discussion of infrastructure capacity. First, practitioners report needing to continually adapt to evolving circumstances including participant's recent interests and full classes. Practitioners have demonstrated adaptability to infrastructure capacity changes by being approachable when an individual community member wants to implement a new program and allowing them to run a couple of classes. The adaptability exhibited by the practitioners illustrates a contribution to the organizational capacity literature. Previous research identified facilities as a significant consideration in municipal recreation (Leone, Barnes, & Sharpe, 2015). Yet, the ability of the programs and practitioners to adapt to changing infrastructural concerns adds to our understanding of this topic. As discussed by practitioners, program instructors were able to personalize experiences for older adult participants by providing modifications of exercises for those with injuries. Older adults were also encouraged to approach their program instructors at the beginning of the program session to discuss accommodations that they need. Being adaptable to diverse needs was also evident with older adult volunteers. For example, Ivy spoke to how older adults would tell her about physical or intellectual limitations and they would find a volunteer position that suits their interests and these

needs. This relates back to the older adult perspective discussion in the literature review and document analysis chapters. Older adults are diverse in ways including, but not limited to, abilities and cultural backgrounds (Halton Region, 2015). It is important for recreation practitioners to be aware of these diverse needs when planning programs for an older adult community.

Accessing facilities for recreation programs and volunteer opportunities is a concern for older adults in a municipal recreation context (Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016). Practitioners report lacking the available program space if a program only has a couple of people registered, therefore they need to cancel the class. The findings from the older adult interviews indicated that program cancellations lead to disappointment. These cancellations are usually last-minute, so the older adults cannot register for something else as that class would most likely be full. Practitioners also acknowledge the concern of asking too much of their paid instructors to teach a program with less than the minimum number of participants. Claire discussed how there needed to be a change in program offerings when there was a decrease in participation by the older adults.

Access can also take the form of transportation, that is, getting to the centre. Some older adults who come to the Burlington Seniors' Centre do not drive, so they must rely on public transportation to get to their recreation program or volunteer shift. These individuals describe public transit as inconvenient due to wait times and inflexible schedules (Glasgow & Blakely, 2000). The Burlington Seniors' Centre offers mobility services, so older adults can get to and from their commitments. Transportation is likely less available and less convenient in the winter months, which is consistent with other research showing that inclement weather during winter makes it more difficult for older adults to drive or walk places (Clarke, Yan, Keusch, &

Gallagher, 2015). The context-specific considerations raised in this discussion align with Misener and Doherty's (2013) finding that organizations may yield unique case-specific capacity conclusions. Relationship and network capacity will be discussed next to highlight connections made within the seniors' centre and outside of the context.

7.3.2 Relationship and Network Capacity

Relationship and network capacity involve the ability of municipal recreation departments to develop connections with community partners. My research found that community partnerships and connections allow practitioners to get new ideas for diverse programming. Misener and Doherty (2013) argue that inter-organizational relationships (IORs) are one way for community sport organizations, or, in this case, seniors' centres, to acquire needed resources, knowledge and other benefits. Each organization has to determine the worth of a partnership and create a win-win situation to ensure that there is value in forming an alliance with the other organization. In 2017, the Ministry of Tourism, Sport, and Culture and the City of Burlington partnered to create a progressive sports stream for older adults. The Pickleball program stream was designed collaboratively by both organizations: funded by the Ministry and housed at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. These programs were created from the City of Burlington's need to keep older adults healthy and engaged in their community and to meet the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Culture's vision to develop sports programs for older adults. Thus, this partnership was mutually beneficial (Babiak & Thibault, 2008). This initiative is discussed in more detail in the document analysis chapter.

Misener and Doherty (2013) argue that community organizations use relationships to enhance their programs and services through various means. As mentioned previously, individuals from the community approach recreation practitioners with program ideas that have

not yet been implemented at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. For example, a community member approached the recreation practitioner to develop a specific square-dancing class that had not yet been offered in the dance portfolio.

IORs also facilitate the standardization of recreation program content and instruction. The City of Burlington's role in developing the Burlington Active Aging Plan, sponsored by the Ministry of Senior Affairs is an example of this partnership. The Burlington Active Aging Plan resulted in program restructuring, that is, the same courses at different times and taught by different instructors were provided in the same way. This was accomplished through the development of structured lesson plans to ensure that older adults were getting similar program experiences. Hence, IORs represent an opportunity for the increasing structure of recreation programs. Recreation practitioners state that structured lesson plans improve the quality of recreation programs. By providing consistent instruction, this allows program instructors to become an 'experience facilitator', rather than simply an 'activity provider' (Parr & Lashua, 2004). This finding aligns with relevant literature (Misener & Doherty, 2013). However, further research is needed into how these structured program experiences meet the diverse needs of older adults.

Often, local organizations or municipalities are prompted to make community participation more accessible for older adults. Community capacity reflects to what degree the participants feel that people in their community have the resilience to address community issues in productive, collective ways. By engaging individually with community partners and obtaining funding through provincial grants, this shows the range of connections that can occur in a municipal recreation planning context. Next, I discuss the importance of practitioners and

instructors to be present and facilitate meaningful experiences for older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

7.3.3 Human Resources Capacity

Human resources capacity involves the ability to have paid staff and volunteers within an organization, and the knowledge and attitudes that these individuals hold (Hall et al., 2003). Recreation practitioners identified various human resources considerations including the knowledge and relationships of instructors to participants, as being crucial to the continued success of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. This insight aligns with existing research (Hall et al., 2003; Genoe & Liechty, 2017; Liechty & Genoe, 2015).

Recreation Coordinators and Programmers are responsible for attracting knowledgeable people who have the appropriate skills in leading the diverse recreation programs offered at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Similar to Genoe and Liechty (2017), possessing the appropriate skills is an important consideration when hiring recreation program instructors. As was identified in the findings' chapters, in 2017, new changes with the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan saw Recreation Coordinators being responsible for conceptualizing the program, developing program plans, and recruiting instructors at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Instructors are selected to teach recreation programs based on their experience in the program area, and if hired, are considered the "subject master". The coordinator and instructor then work in collaboration to develop program lesson plans. Hence, the skills that practitioners and instructors possess are important in the development of recreation programs.

Previous research has discussed the underlying power implications that are the result of collaborative planning (Healey, 2003; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000). A collaborative planning process should adapt and adhere to the specific context in which it is being used. For this study,

lesson plan development took place at the Burlington Seniors' Centre in collaboration with both the recreation practitioners and program instructors. Policies are one of the forces that shape municipal recreation provision, and lesson plans at the Burlington Seniors' Centre had to align with City of Burlington policies and procedures. So, although program instructors were involved in the lesson plan development, practitioners still had the final say over what is being delivered in recreation programs.

Transitioning between program instructors, as was established in the interviews with participants, is important to the experiences of older adults. Throughout this study, it was clear that older adults have developed relationships with their instructors and when instructors had to leave their position for some reason, this had an impact on program experiences. While Doherty et al. (2014) note the importance of transitioning volunteers out of key roles in community sport contexts, further research is needed for paid instructors in a municipal recreation context. Specifically, sharing the knowledge of diverse participants needs from one instructor to the next is important to enhancing program experiences and smoothing tensions.

The analysis of the Burlington Seniors' Centre, in terms of how it builds community for its older adult participants, contributes to existing municipal recreation literature through case-specific findings. The volunteer capacity at the Burlington Seniors' Centre is one such finding. There are about 50 volunteers at the seniors' centre, many volunteering weekly. The Burlington Seniors' Centre reliance on volunteers, specifically in the Bistro kitchen, challenges existing literature. Sharpe (2006) argues that recruiting volunteers in community organizations is challenging. The grassroots league in Sharpe's (2006) study struggled with bringing in volunteers to help with supplementary tasks and responsibilities (e.g. running concession stand, coaching). However, this is not the case at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The Bistro's large

volunteer base emerged from the existence of a strong sense of community among volunteers, and the desire of people to give back. As noted in the findings' chapters, the volunteers were constantly looking for something else to do, illustrating their ability to help with random tasks and the extent to which they felt this was a community they were interested in helping to build.

Understanding organizational capacity informs and contributes to municipal recreation research. The key pillars from Hall et al.'s (2003) framework that were discussed in this section include infrastructure capacity, relationship and network capacity, and human resources capacity. Infrastructure capacity, namely the ability of seniors' centres to accommodate diverse older adults' needs is an evolving entity. Relationship and network capacity take the form of practitioners developing working relationships and partnerships with community members and provincial organizations. Qualified recreation practitioners and program instructors are essential to the operations at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

7.4 What Comes Next?

Seniors' centres, more specifically the recreation programs and volunteer opportunities that are offered in these contexts, are complex. Assessing how the Burlington Seniors' Centre builds community for its older adult participants provides many insights that contribute to seniors' centre experiences, organizational capacity, and community literature. The experiences of older adults at seniors' centres reaffirm the importance of social connections as individuals age. Furthermore, organizational considerations are important to the development of recreation programs and volunteer opportunities at a municipal seniors' centre. The strength of relationships between older adult participants and instructors, and experiences of social isolation inform the existing literature. This study will conclude with some closing remarks, highlighting areas for future research and recommendations for practitioners.

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Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.0 Overview of the Thesis

The experiences of older adults are a primary consideration at seniors' centres. This thesis presents an in-depth exploration into how one municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants. Specifically, this thesis explored the role that community plays in recreation programming, and the extent to which older adults and recreation practitioners build community at the seniors' centre. A qualitative case study methodology was employed to unpack the multi-layered insights at a specific Canadian seniors' centre: the Burlington Seniors' Centre in Burlington, Ontario. Multiple research methods were used to uncover the various findings. Preliminary document analysis of promotional materials and policies and procedures manuals was the first phase of this research project. Other methods included in-depth interviews with four recreation practitioners, eight older adult participants and observations of recreation programs. Reflexive memos and journaling were also used. Through the process of triangulation (Stake, 1995), these various sources were brought together during the data analysis process resulting in the emergence of nuanced and layered findings (Yin, 2009).

The following three themes arose from this study and contribute to the academic literature: (1) community building, (2) the experiences of older adults in seniors' centres, (3) organizational capacity in municipal recreation. These three perspectives enrich our understanding of how community is built at a municipally-run seniors' centre. Experiential considerations allow us to understand the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences. Also, structural considerations inform how recreation programs are developed and how practitioners attempt to build community.

Prominent insights emerge from this study. For this case, certain conditions exist helping to foster community in seniors' centres. Older adults thrive in recreation programs and volunteer roles when there is an inclusive and supportive space provided by the facilitator (e.g. recreation program or volunteer instructor). Developing relationships through social experiences, improving skills while aging in a supportive group environment, and strengthening belonging in recreation program and volunteer groups were all important to the building of community for older adults. These experiential considerations are important to inform how programs and opportunities are structured. However, a disconnect exists between the experiential and structural considerations. The Burlington Seniors' Centre is moving towards implementing structured experiences, mainly through the elimination of volunteer instructors and transitioning to paid City of Burlington employees, as well as pre-developed lesson plans. While practitioners support structure, some older adults' value diverse recreation program and volunteer experiences. A balance must be struck between creating structured recreation program experiences and meeting the diverse social, skill, and community aspects for older adults.

8.1 Implications for Practice and Research

It is important to understand that knowledge translation occurs as we move the ideas presented in research to practice. The implications that arise from this research are relevant for both future practices within a municipally-run seniors' centre as well as future research in the field.

8.1.1 Implications for Practice

The present study contributes to the body of knowledge and practice related to municipally-run seniors' centres by adding a rich understanding of older adults' experiences in recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Findings from this study can be used to

influence policy on a municipal level. When municipalities better understand arising issues, they can put in place appropriate policies to solve them. No participants in this study identified as living in retirement homes or long-term care homes. Practitioners should consider creating policies that help facilitate availability, affordability and access to recreation programs for individuals who live in these environments. This could be accomplished by partnering with long-term care homes to facilitate day trips to the seniors' centre, so they can become socially integrated into their community with other older adults.

Practitioners in this study also identified that programming could improve efforts to provide cultural programming for diverse older adults. Although there is a demographic lack of cultural diversity where the Burlington Seniors' Centre is located, this represents an opportunity to bring new user groups in. Partnerships with cultural organizations in the City of Burlington could help to improve programming. For example, the City of Burlington could increase public awareness of cultural events through marketing efforts. Also, practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre could develop a multiculturalism event, where organizations could bring in food and activities. For recreation programs, the practitioners can meet with the leaders of cultural organizations to see if they would like to lead a workshop-style program.

Developing personalized experiences is a way that recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, through offering diverse recreation programs and volunteer opportunities, and adapting these experiences for older adults with specific needs. Future research could address the importance of personalizing experiences for older adults at seniors' centres, and how this contributes to community building. Relating back to the document analysis chapter, the Burlington Active Aging Plan discussed the development of a "Personal Leisure Assessment Tool" to help older adult participants make recreation program choices

which suit their skills and interests, increase safety and allow for greater accommodation of individual needs (City of Burlington, 2017, p. 31). The implementation of leisure assessment tools at seniors' centres in municipalities around Ontario would allow older adults to ensure that they will choose a recreation program that is right for them.

As described in the rationale for this study and the findings portion of this thesis, social isolation is a key issue that affects the older adult population. Future municipal-level policies and practices should quickly aim to target and identify older adults who are at a risk of becoming socially isolated (Cattan et al., 2005). There is a need for municipal parks and recreation departments to collaborate with older adults to create and implement these programs. For older adults with limited mobility and lack of transportation rendering them unable to get to the Burlington Seniors' Centre, teleconference calls can assist in keeping individuals socially connected. The Burlington Active Aging Plan briefly mentioned tele-calls to socially isolated older adults, so putting this into implementation by front desk volunteers making weekly phone calls will contribute to decreased social isolation (City of Burlington, 2017).

8.1.2 Areas for future research

This research on how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community for its older adult participants raises additional questions. To illuminate the voices, stories, and experiences of older adults participating in a seniors' centre, we need to see more qualitative and creative methods used in research. In this section, various areas for future study are presented to help guide future research on this topic. To begin, this study presented findings involving one municipal seniors' centre in an urban community. Thus, an in-depth examination of rural seniors' centres or a comparative exploration of urban and rural seniors' centres would build on these study findings.

Within the scope of my thesis, I have not yet considered the voices of family and friends – both key members of older adults' experiences of community at seniors' centres. As an extension of this research, it would be interesting to understand how adult children caregivers and friends encourage their relatives to get involved at seniors' centres. Specifically, the influence that these individuals have on their experiences.

These ideas could be further explored through understanding how "power" is distributed within municipally-run seniors' centres. As a practitioner in the field, we often work with individuals to make personalized choices about recreation programs and volunteer opportunities. Yet unintentionally, we take on the role of "power" by assuming we know what is best. The findings of this study support the Halton Older Adult Plan (2015) that older adults who participate at seniors' centres are diverse in ways including but not limited to abilities and generational attitudes. By suggesting recreation programs that may be of interest to older adults illustrates an assumption of power by the practitioners as they know best. Further research into the role of power at seniors' centres and with older adult participants is beneficial to understand how this affects community building.

8.2 Reflections on the Research Process

Coming to the end of this research has allowed me to step back and examine the evolution of the study. At the beginning of this process, the intent was to examine the older adult experiences of sense of community within the potential third-place of a seniors' centre. In essence, I wanted to understand how older adults participating at a seniors' centre developed a subjective sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), and also identified it as a third place (Oldenburg, 1999). However, after choosing to use an interpretivist orientation, I sensed that there was a contradiction between using these pre-conceived terms and the methodological

approach. I then simplified the purpose of this study to understand how community is built for

older adults at the Burlington Seniors' Centre, to allow for findings from this study to evolve

from what participants are saying. Based on practical experiences and interests and a review of

the literature, I sensed that there was an importance of understanding the experiences of older

adults in recreation programs and volunteer roles. According to the literature, relatively little is

known about seniors' centres and their provision of recreation programs by municipal parks and

recreation departments (Strobl et al., 2016). More specifically, previous research has indicated

that older adults who participate in seniors' centres have formed meaningful relationships,

allowing them to rebuild social ties that that may have been lost to significant life transitions

such as retirement (Hutchinson & Gallant, 2016). Through this literature review, I was interested

in learning about the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences at seniors'

centres, how recreation programs are developed, and how older adults and recreation

practitioners build community at a seniors' centre.

Beginning this research with an analysis of promotional materials and policies and

procedures manuals allowed for a thoughtful start to the study. The main message from the

promotional materials *"Burlington is a caring community"* had me wondering how? With a

critical lens, I conducted observations at the Burlington Seniors' Centre including interactions

between older adult participants and program instructors. I also examined and considered the

underlying meaning in messages from other written and verbal exchanges outside of the study. It

was clear that the power of language in policies and procedures and how it constructs

assumptions may not be reflected in practice. According to Prior (2003), documents are

embedded within the culture of an organization, having practical and social impacts. With this

case, the development of the Burlington Active Aging Plan involved community consultation with older adults.

The scope of this study shifted throughout its duration, as is natural with qualitative research. When interviewing the older adults, I asked them to give their personal definition of 'community' and examples of their experiences of community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The first time I asked someone about community, their facial expression changed from interest to eagerness; the older adults craved to talk about their experiences at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. Community was evident with shared experiences in recreation programs with the same participants and instructors as well as the same team of volunteers. Weaving the concept of community into interviews with older adults enabled me to understand their personal experiences of community in recreation programs and volunteer roles.

Interviews with recreation practitioners at the Burlington Seniors' Centre highlighted additional aspects of community. With the practitioners, I was interested in understanding the role that community plays (if any) in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre. The unanimous answer was "everything". The practitioners emphasized a great change in the culture of seniors' centres to acknowledge that older adults are vibrant individuals, seeing the development of more fitness classes and communal dining experiences.

In undertaking a case study process of active engagement with participants, I learnt firsthand the challenges of fieldwork, reflecting on and reporting the fieldwork process as a means of producing 'rich' data and insightful interpretations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2012). Within this thesis, it was argued that to develop an understanding of how a municipally-run seniors' centre builds community with older adult participants, engagement with different groups of older adults in recreation programs needs to occur. The culture in each recreation program was

different – for example, Beginner Line Dancing had a different feel to it then the 'What If' discussion group. This emphasizes that each recreation program represents a different sub-community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre.

8.3 Conclusions

The people I met while engaging in this research have challenged my ways of thinking. Both the recreation practitioners and older adult participants have encouraged me to continue asking questions and seek to understand the experiences of older adults in seniors' centres across Ontario. As a result of this study, I find myself more intrigued by the role that community plays in recreation programming and the engagement of older adults in program development processes. The findings of this study have implications on the lives of older adults who participate at the Burlington Seniors' Centre and contributes to thinking of the role that community plays in other municipal recreation contexts for older adults.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Burlington Seniors' Centre Recruitment Letter

To whom it may concern:

This letter is a request for Burlington Senior Centre's assistance with a project I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Heather Mair. The title of my research project is "Older Adults Experiences of Community in Municipal Recreation Contexts: A Case Study of the Burlington Seniors Centre". I would like to provide you with more information about this project that explores how the Burlington Seniors Centre builds community for its older adult participants and what role (if any) does community play in recreation programming.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Burlington Seniors Centre builds community for its older adult participants. Knowledge generated from this study may help other leisure researchers and recreation practitioners understand the importance of informal social engagement opportunities for older adults to decrease social isolation for this population.

It is my hope to connect with older adult participants who participate in the recreation programs and recreation practitioners who are responsible for designing and delivering the recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors Centre to invite them to participate in this research project. I believe that the older adult participants have unique understandings and stories relating to their recreation program experience and the recreation practitioners have knowledge of the role that community plays in recreation programming. During the course of this study, I will be conducting document analysis of strategic plans and recreation program booklets to assess how community is described and fostered (by intention) through recreation programming. I also plan on completing interviews with older adult participants (to understand the meanings that they associate with their experiences at the Burlington Seniors Centre) and recreation practitioners (to understand what role, if any, community plays in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors Centre). I would also like to request permission to conduct observations at the centre during recreation programs to gain a better understanding of the meanings that older adults associate with their experiences at the Burlington Seniors Centre. This will involve me maintaining mental notes of how the program is structured (e.g. city employee instructor or volunteer instructor), the culture of the program (e.g. what goes on). I will also invite members to engage in informal conversations about the role that they see community playing in recreation programming.

To respect the privacy and rights of the Burlington Seniors Centre and its participants, I will be contacting the older adult participants and recreation practitioners only upon receiving consent to conduct my study in this context. I will provide information letters (interview and participant observations) that outline specific details about the study, participants rights, and my contact information for those interested.

For participant recruitment (specific to the interviews), I will ask the recreation practitioners for any suggestions of older adults that they think may be interested. The recreation practitioners will request permission from potential participants prior to sharing their contact information from me. I would also like to request permission to set up an information table at the centre so that I can answer any questions and inform potential participants about the study.

For participant recruitment (specific to participant observations), I will ask the recreation practitioners to connect me with program instructors to seek their permission on observations, and informally interacting with participants. I would also like to request permission to post notices of observations and introduce myself during programs before conducting my observations, explaining my role as a researcher and what my study is about.

Participation of any individual in this study is completely voluntary. Each participant will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. All participants will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study, as well as informed consent forms that will outline their rights.

To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the stories will be used labelled with pseudonyms, chosen by the participants, to protect their identity. Names of participants will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study.

If the Burlington Seniors Centre wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. Collected data will be stored in a locked office and on a password protected computer for a minimum of one year.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision belongs to the Burlington Seniors Centre, and the participants.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at bs2gibbo@uwaterloo.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Heather Mair, wiith any questions you may have by email at hmai@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to the Burlington Seniors Centre, to the recreation practitioners and to the older adult participants, as well as to the leisure research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Brooke Gibbons
Master's Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Appendix B: Email Script

     Appendix B1: Email Script—Recreation Practitioners

Email Subject Line: University of Waterloo Study – Role of Community at the Burlington Seniors Centre

I am inviting you to take part in an interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes. As part of my graduate program in Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, I am carrying out a study to understand how community is built for older adult participants at the Burlington Seniors Centre. I am interested in learning what role community plays in recreation programs and other opportunities at the Burlington Seniors Centre.

I selected your name for this study because you are a Recreation Coordinator/Programmer at the Burlington Seniors Centre.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question(s) you prefer not to answer by requesting to skip the question. You may withdraw your consent to participate and have your data destroyed by contacting me up until January 2019 as it is not possible to withdraw your data once analysis has begun. I have attached a copy of the information letter about this study that will give you full details.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE #40180). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Brooke Gibbons
Master's Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Email Subject Line: University of Waterloo Study – Role of Community at the Burlington Seniors Centre

I am inviting you to take part in an interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes. As part of my graduate program in Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, I am carrying out a study to understand how community is built for older adult participants at the Burlington Seniors Centre. I am interested in learning what role community plays in recreation programs and other opportunities at the Burlington Seniors Centre.

I selected your name as you showed interest in this study by signing a recruitment card after I gave a brief description of my when you approached my information table.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question(s) you prefer not to answer by requesting to skip the question. You may withdraw your consent to participate and have your data destroyed by contacting me up until February 2019 as it is not possible to withdraw your data once analysis has begun. I have attached a copy of the information letter about this study that will give you full details.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE #40180). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Brooke Gibbons
Master's Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Interview Information Letter

Title of the Study: Older Adults Experiences of Community in Municipal Recreation Contexts: A Case Study of the Burlington Seniors Centre

Faculty Supervisor: Heather Mair, PhD, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo. Email: hmair@uwaterloo.ca

Student Investigator: Brooke Gibbons, MA (Candidate), Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo. Email: bs2gibbo@uwaterloo.ca

To help you make an informed decision regarding your participation, this letter will explain what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits, and your rights as a participant. If you do not understand something in the letter, please ask the student investigator prior to consenting to participating in the study. You will be provided with a copy of the information form and consent form if you choose to participate in the study.

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study about the role that community plays for older adults in a municipal recreation context. The purpose of this case study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Burlington Seniors Centre builds community for its older adult participants. Past research has shown that older adults' participation in a seniors centre can lead to decreased feelings of loneliness.

The study is being undertaken as part of my (Brooke Gibbons) Master's research. I plan to combine my literature and document review of municipal recreation service provision and older adults' recreation participation with perspectives from older adults and recreation practitioners.

I. Your responsibilities as a participant

What does participation involve?

Participation in this study will involve an interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. A light snack and refreshments will be provided. The interview will be held in the meeting room at the Burlington Seniors Centre at a time and date that is convenient for you. You will first be asked to choose a pseudonym to protect their personal identity, and then I will guide a conversation on recreation program participation and design at the Burlington Seniors Centre, personal experiences of community and what role (if any) community plays in recreation programming in this space. The types of questions that I will ask include; what does it mean for you to be able to participate in recreation programs? Can you explain what role (if any) that community plays in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors Centre? With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate transcript of the

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interviews. With your permission, quotations under the pseudonym may be used in publications and/or presentations.

Who may participate in the study?

In order to participate in the study you must be an older adult recreation program participant (aged 55 plus) or a recreation practitioner at the Burlington Seniors Centre.

II. Your rights as a participant

Is participation in the study voluntary?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question(s) you prefer not to answer by requesting to skip the question. Further, you may end the interview at any time by advising the researcher of the decision. You may withdraw your consent to participate and have your data destroyed by contacting the researcher up until February 2019 as it is not possible to withdraw your data once data analysis for my thesis has begun.

What are the possible benefits of the study?

Participation in this study may not provide any personal benefit to you, however, your responses are valuable in my understanding of how the Burlington Seniors Centre builds community for its older adult participants. Your interview responses will help me understand the relationship between community and recreation program experiences.

What are the risks associated with the study?

Given the focus of the study and the small group of those involved, it's possible that others may be able to identify your involvement by recognizing comments made by you in the study results, even with the use of pseudonyms. However, there are no anticipated risks associated with this.

Will my information be kept confidential?

Your participation will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in any paper or publication resulting from this study. Identifying information will be removed from the data that is collected and stored separately. Collected data will be stored on a password protected computer and in a locked office for a minimum of one year.

III. Questions, comments, or concerns

Who is sponsoring/funding this study?

The study is not funded by any grants.

Has the study received ethics clearance?

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE #40180). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding my participation in this study?

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact Brooke Gibbons by email at bs2gibbo@uwaterloo.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Heather Mair, with any questions you may have by email at hmair@uwaterloo.ca

Brooke Gibbons
Master's Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Consent Form

By providing your consent, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator or involved institution from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Title of the Study: Older Adults Experiences of Community in Municipal Recreation Contexts: A Case Study of the Burlington Seniors Centre

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Brooke Gibbons, under the supervision of Dr. Heather Mair, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to the study and have received answers to my questions and additional details.

I was informed that participation in the study is voluntary and that I can withdraw this consent by informing the researcher before January 2019.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE #40180). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

For all other questions contact Brooke Gibbons at bs2gibbo@uwaterloo.ca.

☐ I agree that interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

☐ I give permission for the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes from this research.

☐ I agree of my own free will to participate in the study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____   Date:_____

Researcher's/Witness' signature_____   Date:_____

Appendix D1: Interview Guide—Recreation Practitioners

Briefing before interview: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and taking time out of your day. As outlined in the interview information letter, this interview will allow me to better understand how community is built for older adults at the Burlington Seniors Centre. Please note that your responses will be used for research purposes only. There is no particular focus to my questions, but it would be best if you could draw on your personal experience(s). The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me? If not, great, let's begin!

Topic: Role at Burlington Seniors Centre
1. Can you tell me about your staff title and role? What does your job involve?
   a. How long have you been working in this role?
2. Tell me about your experience working at the Burlington Seniors Centre
3. What types of programs and services are available at the Burlington Seniors Centre?
4. How would you describe the characteristics of people who use this center?
   a. What would you say is the average age?
   b. What kinds of interests would you say they have?

Topic: Recreation Program Design for Older Adults
5. Can you take me through the process of how recreation programs are designed and implemented for older adults at the BSC?
   a. How are recreation program designs influenced by existing documents (i.e. BAAP, Official Plan, Halton Older Adult Plan)
   b. What type of language is used in documents to promote community building?
6. Who is involved in the recreation program design process?
   a. How is information shared among staff members?
   b. Tell me how older adults are involved in the program design process.

Topic: Community
7. From your understanding, why do most participants attend and get involved at the BSC?
   a. What meanings do you think older adults associate with their experiences at BSC?
8. Can you tell me what your personal definition of community is?
9. What role does community play in recreation programming?
   a. Tell me about significant relationships you see between participants.
10. Through different recreation programs that the centre offers, can you explain communities that exist?
    b. Outside of recreation programs, can you identify informal communities that exist?

Debriefing after interview: Well, those are all the questions that I have for you today. Thank you for your participation and your reflections on your experiences at the Burlington Seniors Centre for its community building. Once I have transcribed the interview, I would appreciate an opportunity to verify with you that everything I have written is correct. I can send you an

electronic copy of the transcript, and you can provide written feedback, or we can meet in person to discuss. I look forward to speaking with you again soon. Thank you for your time!

Appendix D2: Interview Guide—Recreation Program Participants

Briefing before interview: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and taking time out of your day. As outlined in the interview information letter, this interview will allow me to better understand how community is built for older adults at the Burlington Seniors Centre. Please note that your responses will be used for research purposes only. There is no particular focus to my questions, but it would be best if you could draw on your personal experience(s). The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me? If not, great, let's begin!

Topic: Introduction
1. What is your personal definition of community?
2. How would you define your personal community (or social support) (i.e. connections with family members or friends) before you started coming to the center?
3. Tell me about periods of loneliness (or isolation) before coming to the center. How were your periods of loneliness related, if all, to the lack of social support from friends?

Topic: Burlington Seniors Centre/Community
4. What initially drew you to participating at the BSC and how long have you been coming to the center?
5. What is it about the BSC that makes you want to spend your free time there as opposed to other places?
6. What different activities (programs, trips, events) have you taken part in here at the BSC?
   a. Why do you participate in those programs?
   b. What does it mean for you to be able to participate in those programs?
   c. Tell me a story of a recreation program where you have experienced community
7. How is community built at the BSC?
   a. Tell me about your relationships with other participants in the program.
   b. How did you end up interacting with participants?
   c. How do these relationships influence your participation?
8. If someone told you there would be no (insert program) next year, how would that make you feel?

Debriefing after interview: Well, those are all the questions that I have for you today. Thank you for your participation and your reflections on your experiences at the Burlington Seniors Centre for its community building. Once I have transcribed the interview, I would appreciate an opportunity to verify with you that everything I have written is correct. I can send you an electronic copy of the transcript, and you can provide written feedback, or we can meet in person to discuss. I look forward to speaking with you again soon. Thank you for your time!

Appendix E: Feedback Letter for Participants

Dear *(Insert Name of Participant),*

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study entitled "Older Adults Experiences of Community in Municipal Recreation Contexts: A Case Study of the Burlington Seniors Centre". As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of how the Burlington Seniors Centre builds community for its older adult participants.

The data collected during the secondary data analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observations will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of informal social engagement opportunities for older adults, for future development of new recreation programs.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#40180). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.
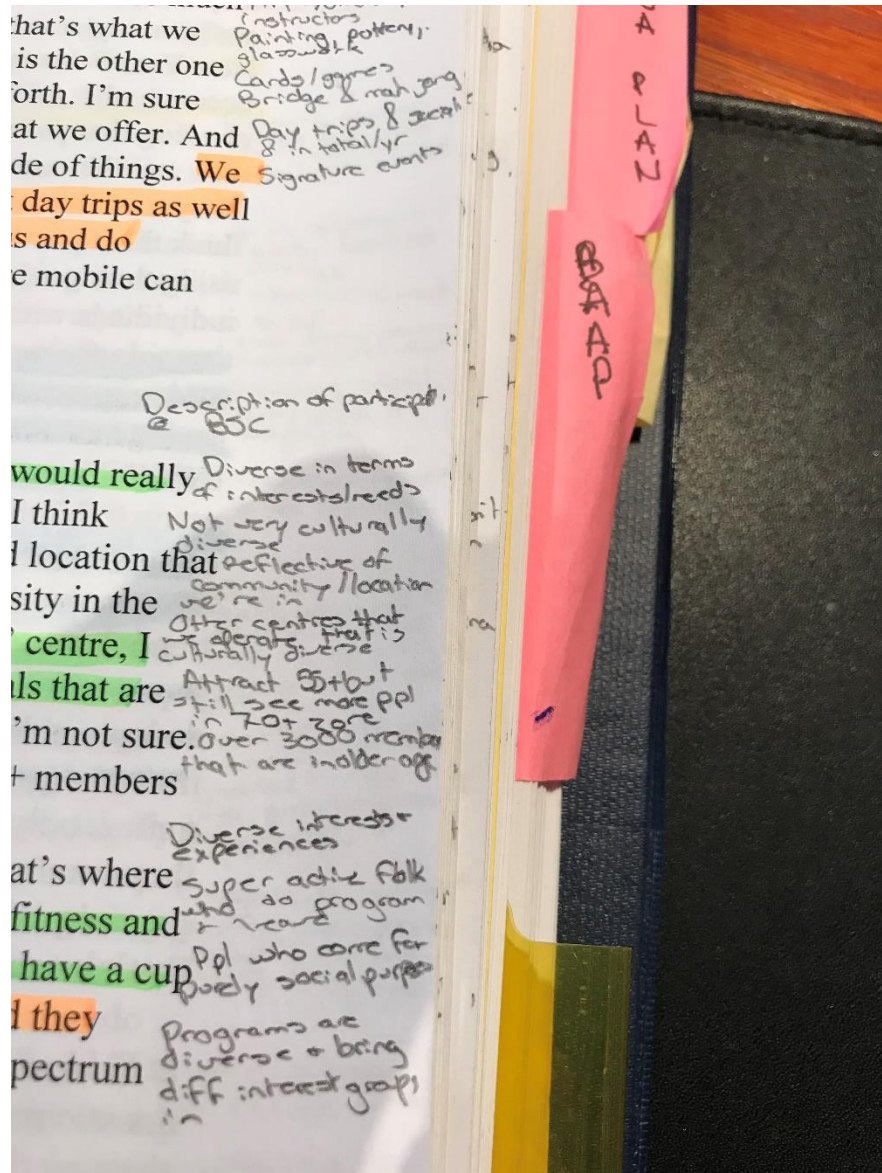
For all other questions contact Brooke Gibbons at bs2gibbo@uwaterloo.ca

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by April 2019, I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email.

Yours sincerely,

Brooke Gibbons
Master's Candidate
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies
University of Waterloo

Appendix F: Line-by-line coding

that's what we — Instructors, Painting, pottery, glasswork

is the other one — Cards/games

forth. I'm sure — Bridge & mahjong

at we offer. And — Day trips, 8 zcah 8 in total/yr

de of things. We — Signature events

day trips as well

s and do

e mobile can

Description of participt. @ BSC

would really — Diverse in terms of interests/needs

I think — Not very culturally diverse

location that — Reflective of community / location we're in

sity in the — Other centres that operate, that is culturally diverse

centre, I

ls that are — Attract 85+but still see more ppl in 70+ zone

'm not sure. — Over 3000 members that are in older age

+ members

Diverse interests + experiences

at's where — Super active folk who do program + care

fitness and

have a cup — Ppl who come for purely social purpose

they

pectrum — Programs are diverse + being diff interest groups

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A P L A N

BSA AP

Appendix G: Initial Codes and Focused Codes

Individual/Themes	Initial Codes
Jamie (Recreation Coordinator 1) Progression of recreation; Recreation regardless of age; Minor change=huge deal; Modifications/adaptations; Socials/events; Connection to community partners/region; Levels of engagement; Sub-communities; Community member with new program idea; New trends for programming; Focus on BAAP; Sense of independence; Age in place; Focus on functional movement; Accessible recreation; Feedback for program design; Adult team meeting; Clear goal/outcome; Routine/consistency; Fitness goals; Social aspect; Sense of belonging; New friends/connections; Change is difficult; Wanting to feel needed; Sense of pride; Not a place, but a feeling; Comfortable environment; Social community; Care/concern for each other; Similar interests; Person-person relationships; Culture/tradition of programs	-Introduction of project—how community is built at BSC; draw on personal experiences Role at BSC/what does job involve—Recreation Coordinator of Fitness, Sport, Socials/Special Events -Dance falls under sport portfolio -Day to day operations—hire, train, schedule instructors; supporting CS and Ops staff; making sure other facilities are covered -Home base is at Tansley Woods, rest of team is at BSC; big picture planning happens at BSC -Spend time at Tansley Woods, Mainway, Haber and Brant Hills Diff btwn sport and fitness programs—diff outcomes of programs -Group fitness in community—specific routine or choreographed steps -Diff outcomes in yoga and pilates -Sport—Pickleball is growing fast in Burlington; Badminton and Table Tennis Length of time in role—one year past September -Newest addition to team, was previously Youth Coordinator -Interesting to see progression of recreation throughout the life span; what recreation means to youth vs. older adults Transition between roles—getting used to them operationally -Recreation is recreation, regardless of age -Adults experience program directly; looking for specific recreation program experience -Youth are experiencing program but are dealing with parents who may not be in program -Individual needs need to be addressed no matter of age Caregivers in programs—not too much experience -Caregivers inquire about programs for parents; children of parents call and ask questions -Interesting to see how that dynamic changes from one group to the next Experience working at BSC—two diff kinds of experiences -Instructors may change from one program session to the next—participants resistant to new instructor; upset about new instructor taking over -Participants come and voice concern to Coordinator—new instructor doing something different from old instructor -Difficult to grasp that a minor change can be a huge deal to someone; still getting program from quality instructor -Talk with instructors—capable of making modifications/adaptations that meet most people's needs -Not comfortable speaking with person who can make immediate change -Need to go to highest level possible and have that person direct the instructor to make change -Tell instructor to take 5 minutes to answer participant questions or meet with them individually -Positive experiences with socials/events—Christmas dinner—work with volunteer committee who are involved in planning/organizing—thank you's and gratitude shown from attendees -Dressing up and engaging in social is huge for this age group -Want to see joy and happiness—if you are happy and like what's happening, we are doing our jobs -Can't please everyone—comments of prices and lighting in program spaces that can be changed Christmas Dinner—constant flurry of participants—thank you, this is amazing

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Appendix H: Master Code List

Master Code List

Progression of recreation; Recreation regardless of age; Minor change=huge deal; Modifications/adaptations; Socials/events; Connection to community partners/region; Levels of engagement; Sub-communities; Community member with new program idea; New trends for programming; Focus on BAAP; Sense of independence; Age in place; Focus on functional movement; Accessible recreation; Feedback for program design; Adult team meeting; Clear goal/outcome; Routine/consistency; Fitness goals; Social aspect; Sense of belonging; New friends/connections; Change is difficult; Wanting to feel needed; Sense of pride; Not a place, but a feeling; Comfortable environment; Social community; Care/concern for each other; Similar interests; Person-person relationships; Culture/tradition of programs

Quotes

<u>Value derived from participation</u>
- Jamie: "That sense of independence allows them to continuously participate in community programming and to continue to be active for as long as possible."
- Jamie: "We want to make sure there is a clear goal or outcome to what they are going to get with that program, so whether there is achieving a specific fitness goal or if a particular fitness program is going to help improve an aspect of their health, or their wellbeing, then we try to include that sort of wording into our program descriptions"
- Jamie: "Or with the Pickleball programs, there's people that are working really hard to become better at the sport and to get to the point where they are able to go to some tournaments and potentially win tournaments, we do see a lot of competitiveness in Pickleball"
- Jamie: "I think the reason that all of these people attend these programs, it's an innate feeling for everyone of having that sense of belonging. You can feel like you're apart of something, that you're a part of a community, you're apart of a group of people when you're attending these programs"
- Jamie: "A lot of it is wanting to feel like they are needed, and wanting to feel like their input and their experience and their help is wanted."
- Jamie: "I think it's a sense of wanting to continue to be a functioning and helpful member of the community and society, and also for a lot of them I think it's that sense of pride in the centre"

3) Initial themes based on research questions-February 19, 2019

    a. *How do older adult recreation program participants, volunteers and recreation practitioners build community at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?*

        i. **Structuring experiences**—contributing decisions to structuring experiences, instructional resources, consistent program instruction

        ii. **Integrating belonging and community into daily practice**—culture change, extending welcome and personalized experiences, maintaining connections with community partners

    b. *What meanings do older adults associate with their recreation program and volunteer participation at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?*

        i. **Shared experiences lead to caring relationships**—importance of social connections, expanding social connections

        ii. **Value derived from participation**—acquiring skills and improving while aging, quality of program instructors, balancing social and instructional components

        iii. **Community experiences within a seniors' centre**—appreciating membership and belonging, constraints to community building

    c. *What role (if any) does community play in recreation programming at the Burlington Seniors' Centre?*

        i. **Staff support meaningful social connections**

        ii. **Sharing stories**

        iii. **Strategic community direction**

        iv. **Language of inclusivity and diversity**

        v. **Celebrating individuality and independence**

        vi. **Age-friendly language**

Appendix K: Procedural Memo

<u>Procedural Memo</u>

The following is a list that outlines the steps taken during collection, analysis, and representation of the data:

1) Secondary Data Analysis
   a. Relevant regional and city documents collected and analyzed-July 30-August 6, 2018
2) I finished the transcription of the audio-recorded Recreation Coordinators/Programmer/Supervisor interviews the day after the interview took place to ensure I was properly recording which participant said what. I completed the transcripts myself using iTunes and writing verbatim what was said.
   a. *Recreation Coordinator 1*-December 19. 2018
   b. *Recreation Programmer*-December 20, 2018
   c. *Recreation Coordinator 2*-January 8, 2019
   d. *Recreation Supervisor*-January 17, 2019
3) I finished the initial fieldnotes the day of the participant observation to ensure I was capturing important details of participant interactions and the culture of the program.
   a. *Pickleball*- Monday, January 14
   b. *Ballroom Line Dancing*-Monday, January 14 & 28
   c. *Men's Fit*-Wednesday, January 16 & 30
   d. *Pottery*-Wednesday, January 16 & 23
   e. *Chair Yoga*-Wednesday, January 16 & 30
   f. *Culture of Food*-Thursday January 17 & 30
4) I finished the transcription of the audio-recorded older adult participant interviews the day after the interview took place to ensure I was properly recording which participant said what.
   a. Leslie-January 22, 2019
   b. Alix-January 29, 2019
   c. Brianna-February 7, 2019
5) I did line-by-line coding of all interview transcripts during the same week and updated

Appendix L: Personal Memo

The following is a list that outlines my personal thoughts and feelings during collection, analysis and representation of the data:

1) Interview with Jamie (Recreation Coordinator 1)-December 18, 2018
   a. Used this as kind of a pilot interview considering it was my first one. I was anxious to see if my interview guide would allow for an interesting discussion and thankfully it did.
2) Transcribing Jamie's interview-December 19, 2018
   a. Decided to transcribe my interviews the day after conducting them to allow for a brief turnaround period for the purpose of member checking. I was curious to know how productive I would be and whether I would be able to complete the transcript in one day. I was focused and got the transcript done and sent it back to Jamie. I felt productive and now knew that this would be my routine for the remainder of my interviews. I sent Jamie's completed transcript back to him, thanking him for taking time out of his day to sit down with me
3) Interview with Ivy (Recreation Programmer)-December 19, 2018
   a. This was a busy day. I completed the interview with Ivy in the morning and did Jamie's transcript in the afternoon. During Ivy's interview it was cool to see the different perspective that she was bringing to my questions based on the different role that she has at the Burlington Seniors Centre (BSC).
4) Transcribing Ivy's interview-December 20, 2018
   a. I was focused and motivated to get Ivy's transcript back to her for member checking. This was the last thing that I needed to do before the Christmas break, so that gave me some inspiration. Got it done and sent it off!
5) Setting up Ann's (Recreation Coordinator 2) interview-January 3, 2019

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Analytical Memo

The following is a list that describes some of the initial codes gathered from document analysis, interview transcripts, and observation fieldnotes:

1) Focused coding/finding categories-February 19, 2019
    a. Involvement/Engagement
    b. Something for everyone
    c. Routine/Consistency
    d. Change is difficult
    e. Confronting perspectives on aging
    f. Feeling wanted/purposeful/valued
    g. Importance of wellbeing
    h. Caring for one another
    i. Create social spaces
    j. Resisting aging
    k. Sense of independence
    l. Influence of finances
    m. Wealth of knowledge
    n. Fostering relationships
    o. Programs designed for seniors
    p. Supportive instructors
    q. Person-person relationships
2) Categories based on research questions-February 19, 2019
    a. *What meanings do older adults associate with their participation in recreation programs at the Burlington Seniors Centre?*
        i. Importance of wellbeing
        ii. Care for one another
        iii. Resisting aging
        iv. Sense of independence