"Still Open and Here for You": News Media's Framing of Canadian Public Libraries during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has transformed how social institutions, including public libraries, are able to engage with and support their communities. Whereas previous disaster scenarios have allowed public libraries to be physically open and library staff to be present to connect with patrons, physical distancing mandates associated with COVID-19 safety measures have introduced new challenges for both staff and patrons. While extant COVID-19–focused public library research has analyzed library-produced digital content or statements, we examined the ways in which 218 Canadian newspaper stories framed public library responses to COVID-19. Using frame analysis, we identified three media frames: (re)negotiating the library's space, (re)configuring the library's roles, and (re)constructing "others." These media frames highlight the changes that COVID-19 has effected in public library roles and spaces and how these roles and spaces are differently interpreted for different library patrons.

C OVID-19 has instigated innumerable changes for social institutions, including public libraries. Whereas previous disaster scenarios have generally allowed public libraries to be physically open and library staff to be corporeally present to connect with patrons, physical distancing mandates associated with COVID-19 safety measures have introduced new challenges for staff, patrons, and their communities.

In this article, we explore the way in which the public library response to COVID-19 is framed within public media, specifically, newspaper articles. To date, the majority of extant COVID-19–focused public library research has analyzed library-produced digital content or statements. This article is a notable departure from this existing research landscape for two key reasons. First, to our knowledge, this is the first Canadian-focused study at the intersection of public libraries and COVID-19. Second, to our knowledge, this is also the first available study that examines externally produced media and, in particular, how it has reported on COVID-19's impact on public libraries. As such, this article also contributes more broadly to the small number of studies that examine media representations of public libraries.

The use of frame analysis to examine Canadian news stories was helpful in uncovering news reporters' embedded frames that guide their reporting of public libraries' engagement with their communities. Exploration of these frames lends insight into how journalists, and public media more broadly, represent public libraries in a time of a global health pandemic. These frames are important to analyze given their potential to influence public perception and understandings of social institutions, including public libraries. Indeed, the public turns daily to news media sources to both inform and shape attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, and behaviors. News sources, including newspapers, play an essential communicative role, and it is through communication that "citizens acquire information about issues and problems in the community and learn of opportunities and ways to participate" (McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy 1999, 316). Despite this, little research has focused on the ways in which media reports on and about public libraries and the potential implications thereof. If we consider the news media as a social interpreter, analyzing news articles can helpfully reveal how media considers and interprets the contributions of the public library to the public sphere. Such news stories can have significant effects on the public's beliefs and opinions about the public library and its imagined or actual role in our community fabric.

Literature Review

Libraries have been characterized as anchors in their communities because of three key assets: people, place, and platform (Garmer 2014). As Sara Jones (2020) notes, COVID-19, unlike past crises, has affected each of these three library assets in profound ways. Library services and spaces that were available in past disaster scenarios, such as providing access to computers, providing shelter, or assisting patrons in filling out insurance claims (Jaeger et al. 2006), are no longer possible with libraries needing to be physically closed. As Jones (2020) succinctly summarizes, "Shuttering the library in a crisis is new territory" (954).

Research regarding public libraries' engagement in past health crises reveals a disconnect between patrons' and library staff's expectations of the library in emergency situations. Although libraries are often viewed by patrons as a key source of accurate information (as a place for relatively quick and easy access to information in a crisis situation), library staff receive minimal crisis-related training and are routinely excluded from local emergency preparedness and response activities, nor are public librarians provided with specific training regarding what to do during a crisis (Zach and McKnight 2010a). This disconnect between public and staff expectations may also be linked to public librarians' noted reservations regarding the extent to which they should provide health information or help patrons assess the quality of health information (see, e.g., Harris, Wathen, and Chan 2005; Harris et al. 2010; Rubenstein 2018). Nevertheless, recent reports of public library staff being seconded or hired for contact tracing work and vaccination clinic support (Inklebarger 2020; Brown 2021) might be indicative of a shift in the roles and

responsibilities of public libraries during times of crises, both in terms of enhancing collaborative roles with community emergency responders and in complementing public health efforts.

A quickly growing body of research is carefully examining public libraries' multifaceted and ever-changing roles as COVID-19 itself continues to change, evolve, and create "new territory" that must be negotiated daily. Given the global impact of COVID-19 on everyday life, including public library staff and patrons, existing research ranges from a global documentary analysis of international library and information associations' statements on COVID-19 (Kosciejew 2020) to responses at specific geographic locales, including country-level analyses (Koulouris, Vraimaki, and Koloniari 2020; Wang and Lund 2020) and state-level studies (Santos 2020), to specific public library systems' responses (Alajmi and Albudaiwi 2020).

Likely as a result of libraries' physical closures and related difficulties of conducting in-person research, a majority of these aforementioned articles take up and analyze library-produced content or statements from digital sources. Analyses of how the New York City Public Library (NYCPL) mobilized Twitter during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic (Alajmi and Albudaiwi 2020) and Greek libraries' use of social media during early COVID-19–related lockdown (Koulouris et al. 2020) both revealed a "business as usual" approach. Similarly, Bibi M. Alajmi and Dalal Albudaiwi (2020) reported that nearly 86% of NYCPL's 9,450 tweets focused on general library information (library service updates, recommendations for readings, event advertisements), with only 14.5% of analyzed tweets directly related to COVID-19. These authors hypothesize that this approach was taken to provide a sense of normalcy for patrons. However, with more than half of the 189 libraries surveyed by Alexandros Koulouris and colleagues (2020) reporting that they view sharing information about COVID-19 as being outside their duties, further studies might consider speaking directly to library staff to better understand the impetus and rationale behind libraries' public-facing content.

In contrast, some evidence suggests that libraries and library associations are increasingly sharing information about COVID-19 proactively (Wang and Lund 2020; Kosciejew 2020). In keeping with Robin M. Featherstone, Becky J. Lyon, and Angela B. Ruffin's (2008) category of librarians as information disseminators during emergency situations, Ting Wang and Brady Lund (2020) found in their analysis of library announcements from 50 American public libraries of varying size that nearly two-thirds of their sample provided guidance on finding reliable information about COVID-19. Such guidance included infographics that illustrated proper hand-washing technique or the practice of social distancing, as well as links to resources, most often web resources from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.

As indicated, a majority of existing COVID-19 research provides descriptive overviews of library-created digital content. One exception includes the work by Amelia N. Gibson and colleagues (2020), whose crucial and contextual work highlights existing racial and socioeconomic inequities that COVID-19 has highlighted, including the vulnerabilities of "disabled and

chronically ill, older, and BIPOC 'frontline' workers (such as library workers who interface with the public)" (78). These individuals, deemed as essential workers, have to negotiate working in precarious situations that increase the risk of hospitalization and death with their own and their families' health. Another exception is Mega Subramaniam and Linda W. Braun's work (2021) that questions the reactive approach that public libraries have taken during COVID-19. These authors trouble the tendency for public libraries to aim for equality over equity and draft a crises-related research agenda for scholars that assumes an equity lens that prompts researchers to "move away from the 'libraries are neutral' construct and recognize that a focus on neutrality limits staff ability to connect with community members and makes it possible for staff to ignore critical conditions and issues in their communities" (Subramaniam and Braun 2021, 14). Both these works draw critical attention to the understudied issue of equity in library environments and among library workers during times of crises.

As we purposefully moved away from analyses of library-produced content, this study uses frame analysis to explore how Canadian news media framed public libraries' responses and engagement during COVID-19. In doing so, we provide alternative understandings of how public libraries engage with and are interpreted to engage with their communities during crises.

Methods

News is a window on the world, and through its frame, Americans learn of themselves and others, of their institutions, leaders, and lifestyles, and those of other nations and other peoples. The news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know. But, like any frame that delineates a world, a news frame may be problematic. The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard.

   —Gaye Tuchman (1978, 1)

Frame Analysis

To analyze the news media, we applied frame analysis methodology (see Goffman 1974; Entman 1993; Kitzinger 2007), a methodology popular among sociologists and media and communication scholars. Given that news articles (and authors thereof) frame a particular view at a particular moment in time, frame analysis is particularly salient for examining and bringing to light what frames are present or potentially omitted. As Todd Gitlin (1980) notes, such frames are "largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organiz[ing] the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports" (7). Accordingly, frames, in this methodology, are understood as systems of classification (Goffman 1974) or maps (Gamson 1992) that help identify and navigate representations of reality. Any representation of reality

involves framing. As news reporters and journalists report on an event, their journalistic practices assume how an issue should be covered, in addition to their questions asked, words used, and narrative structure employed, and collectively, those practices frame a particular view (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). These frames act to "select some aspect of a perceived reality and make [it] more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993, 52). Frames thus prime readers to respond in particular ways, creating cognitive shortcuts and drawing readers' attention to particular aspects (and not others). Jenny Kitzinger (2007) writes that frames have implications for audiences: "Ideas about the audience are, at the very least implicit, in any framing analysis. This is because frame analysis assumes that frames carry some meaning, or have some impact on/ or engagement with, the schemata inside people's heads or the ideas which circulate within our social networks" (152). Given that public library financial support is often tied to justifying, acquiring, and retaining public funding (Jaeger and Sarin 2016; Sørensen 2021), we propose that frame analysis is a particularly helpful method for LIS researchers to consider integrating, as it identifies news media frames that might affect the public's perception of public libraries' value and practices.

Identifying News Stories

In this study, we searched the following Canadian, news-focused databases: CPI.Q (Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly), CBCA (Canadian Business and Current Affairs) Reference and Current Events, and Canadian Newsstream. We also conducted a more general search in ProQuest Recent Newspapers and EBSCO Discovery Service. In each database, search terms were broad—"public librar*" and ("COVID-19" or "coronavirus")—to match the database's search parameters and to ensure a robust sample to analyze. To complement this more systematic search, we also followed articles and links appearing within our own social media feeds, given the fast-paced changes related to COVID-19.

We searched databases for English-language, Canadian news articles published between January 30, 2020 (the day the Director-General of the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern), and June 15, 2020 (when the search was conducted), that featured or discussed some aspect of COVID-19 and public libraries.

Table 1 outlines the articles included and excluded by database. The initial search resulted in a total of 738 articles, of which 476 were excluded. Articles were excluded when they were duplicate articles or when the article was out of scope (when libraries were not featured in the article). Of the remaining 262 news stories, we excluded an additional 44 articles that we grouped under the category "city closures." In these 44 articles, public libraries were listed

Table 1. News Article Inclusion/Exclusion Counts

Database	Included	City Closures	Excluded
Canadian Newsstream	148	30	411
CBCA	16		37
CPI.Q	3	1	2
EBSCO Discovery Service	8	13	19
ProQuest Recent Newspaper	1		6
Social media	42		1
Total	218	44	476

Note.—CBCA = Canadian Business and Current Affairs; CPI.Q = Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly.

among a myriad of city services or buildings that were either closing, closed, or reopening. Accordingly, a final total of 218 news stories were read and included for analysis.

The vast majority of articles (119 of 218) were published in Ontario, Canada's largest and most populous province. Alberta ($n = 34$) and British Columbia ($n = 28$) were also well represented within the sample, with fewer from Saskatchewan ($n = 10$), Nova Scotia ($n = 8$), New Brunswick ($n = 7$), Manitoba ($n = 5$), Québec ($n = 3$), and Prince Edward Island ($n = 1$). Newfoundland and Labrador and all three Canadian territories (Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut) were not represented in the sample, though five articles were from national media and referred to Canada as a whole. The sample encompassed articles from both urban and more rural sources, with 51 articles from newspapers in a major Canadian city (a provincial or national capital), 91 articles from smaller cities, 42 from newspapers based in towns, and 20 from smaller villages and/or municipalities or regional county newspapers. Although urban centers predominate the sample, rural areas are well represented therein.

Articles varied in length, ranging from 1 to 20 paragraphs, and were on average between 10 and 15 short paragraphs (three-quarters to one page in length). The majority of articles were authored by local journalists, with only a few authors writing more than one article and few articles shared via wire services (i.e., through the Canadian Press, which is the exclusive distributor of the Associated Press in Canada). The sample included articles from a variety of sources in terms of both circulation and political slant and included both large (urban) left and right leaning newspapers and smaller city, town, or regional newspapers.

Furthermore, the sample reflects the larger pattern of concentrated newspaper ownership in Canada, with two chains (PostMedia Network Inc./Sun Media and TorStar Corporation) owning more than 50% of Canadian daily newspapers (News Media Canada 2021). Indeed, a majority of the smaller city, town, and regional community newspapers that composed our sample are owned by Postmedia Network Inc., reflecting a broader national trend (News Media Canada 2019). Although the included articles are still largely written by local authors rather than shared

cross-country by newswire services, a limitation of the sample is the uniform editorial opinion (affecting newspaper content and layout) that results from the centralization of newspaper ownership and organization. Some may argue that this centralization could result in the silencing, rather than celebration, of the diversity of contexts and cultures that exist across Canada. We did not conduct an article-by-article breakdown or comparison of media source type, but the fact that our findings were relatively stable despite source(s) demonstrates the homogenization of Canadian media.

Identifying Frames

Articles were saved using Zotero, an open-source reference management software, that allowed us to collate, organize, and share the data set between authors. The analytic plan was developed collaboratively, and each author read all included news stories numerous times. Researchers employing frame analysis draw on strategies from content and discourse analysis to identify the types of frames that, they believe, are being promoted—alongside their associated discursive cues (Kitzinger 2007).

As several phases of analysis were conducted in parallel, our analytic work was recorded within a shared Google document and in spoken interactions between the authors. Articles were first categorized descriptively, using open coding to identify and name key topics discussed across multiple articles. Each of these open codes came from the content of the articles themselves: key terms, metaphors used, images, narrative structure, individuals quoted, and recurring claims and/or depictions. At this time, the broad themes uncovered concerned the unprecedented nature of the problem and the role of libraries in negotiating the uncertainty related to the pandemic context. During the second phase, called the "axial codification" (Corbin and Strauss 2008), the codes were listed and then distilled to a small number of significant codes: "disaster/crisis response," "uncertainty," "parameters of the public library," "framing of those 'in need,'" "relevance," and "reassurance." This restricted list was used to review the analyzed material once more and to reorder the codes.

A line-by-line reading was conducted while asking the question that emerges specifically from the theory of media framing: How are these issues talked about? In this third phase, which occurred over time and iteratively in engaging with the data and in conversations between the two authors, the thematic codes were further refined as we considered how information was presented in the articles, including implicit meanings and tones of the articles and the language used, particular phrasing, and stylistic choices. Throughout this process, we also explored how frames suggested possible solutions to problems (and obscured or were silent about alternatives). As such, in the next section, we detail the three media frames we identified: (re)negotiating the library's space, (re)configuring the library's roles, and (re)constructing "others." We trace the operation of interrelated media discourses and illustrate how the enactment of these frames reflects and reinforces ambiguity and tension, for example, around the changing

nature of libraries' public spaces during physical distancing mandates. It is important to note that different frames can be identified from different perspectives. Accordingly, the three frames that are outlined in this article are those that we, as the authors, identified from our position at a particular point in time during our (re)reading of the news stories.

Analysis

(Re)Negotiating the Library's Space

Physical distancing mandates and resulting library closures have created unique contexts not previously present in past library-related disaster management scenarios. As a result, a large number of news stories implicitly explored the changing understandings of libraries' space (i.e., the physical and digital infrastructures of the public library), beginning to grapple with the implications of a public library that is simultaneously physically closed and virtually open.

Nearly 50% ($n = 110$) of the news stories highlighted the ways in which libraries were expanding their digital offerings to maintain access to services and resources. Articles cited libraries' facilitating the ability to get a free or temporary library card through an online application rather than having to get a physical card in person; raising awareness about e-resources (numbers of titles, books, magazines, newspapers available); adding new e-book titles; increasing TV show and film streaming allowances from online platforms (i.e., from four up to six per month); and allowing off-site access to ancestry or other software, online language courses, virtual storytimes, and other programming. Underlying the informational tone about these digital services and resources is the plaintive refrain that libraries may be physically closed but are still open and operating and, in many cases, offering "more than ever." This is particularly evident in the following headlines: "'We're still open,' library says" (Ziafati 2020); "Area public libraries: Still open and here for you" (Gardiner 2020); "Library still meeting community's needs" (*Lethbridge Herald* 2020). As pandemic time progressed, the articles shifted from detailing what resources were available to drawing attention to the uptake of these same resources, citing demand and, in this way, underscoring that libraries were providing relevant, desirable services during this time of need:

- "Many branches' digital services saw demand triple, at least, during coronavirus lockdown. . . . 'We had 8,851 people attend these 353 programs in 2019. Here we are in 2020, with no physical building for them to come to . . . we have 15,849 people who either participated live or viewed the recording of the program within the first 24 hours'" (Al-Shibeeb 2020).
- "Lake of Bays virtual libraries 'so popular, so necessary' in COVID-19 crisis: Online programs and services prove popular as Lake of Bays Public Library branches find innovative ways to connect community" (Brownlee 2020b).

- "From allowing residents to get a library card online (5,300 people have signed up for a library card in two months) to beefing up online services (April had 34,000 more online titles checked out than February) to providing portable toilets outside downtown's Central Library and expanding wifi zones for folks with no internet access" (McKenna 2020).

Citing innovative and creative responses to pandemic disruptions, the public library was framed as providing solutions to the new problems of social disconnection and isolation that this pandemic has introduced. Positioning the library as not just still open but thriving, public libraries were also framed as providing freedom and escape in a world that was otherwise newly restrictive. What constitutes the library "space" thus took on new meaning:

- "'Going virtual'—Their doors may remain shut, but Mississippi Mills Public Library has unlocked a virtual world for residents to explore" (Kulp 2020).
- "In a COVID-19 world where passports are worth less than coveted toilet paper, a free Bruce County Public library card offers a 'virtual library branch.' 'We have materials available online 24-7, available to anyone with the library card,' said Brooke McLean, Acting Bruce County Library Director in a March 16 telephone interview, adding they've experienced a 'significant' increase in digital circulation" (Learment 2020).
- "As you already know your local public library is closed, but it's just the buildings that are closed; we are still here for you providing a variety of online and borrowing services" (Gardiner 2020).

This framing of the library as a digital space is a significant departure from existing research about the library as a key "third place" (Dalmer et al. 2020), a large part of which focuses on the library's physical space. As Graeme Peters, interim chief executive officer (CEO) of the New Tecumseth Public Library, summarizes, "The sudden transition to an all-digital world has been an interesting challenge for libraries, given how they have traditionally been hubs of community engagement and social inclusion" (Pritchard 2020). Indeed, COVID-19 has revealed (and perhaps expedited) the malleability of library workers' and scholars' understandings of physical spaces.[1] The physical space of the library, which is so often confined to the walls of the public library, is being stretched as, for example, patrons participate in or listen to library programs from their own homes and as public libraries enhance Wi-Fi services outside their physical

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1. Although the switch to a fully digital library presence has spurred a malleability in the way library as place is conceived, Subramaniam and Braun (2021) are quick to note how the inflexibility of other library aspects that have direct impact on frontline library staff have been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic: "Library policies and structure are not agile and flexible enough to allow staff to immediately pivot toward fulfilling the imminent needs of their communities" (8).

buildings. These framings are changing understandings of library space, turning the focus from the importance of the library as place to the importance of digital access and digital tools: "The library is also promoting its ebooks, audio books and other learning tools, like Mango Languages. 'These have always been available to our patrons but perhaps have never been as important as now,' she [Glenda Newbatt, manager of library services] said" (Pritchard 2020). One notable news story in the *Arnprior Chronicle-Guide* playfully muddles the traditional approach to library as (physical) place and reveals patrons' deep connection with their local library space. In a news story titled, "Arnprior knitters stitch a solution to coronavirus lockdown," a group of knitters (the "What Knots") are pictured sitting distanced from one another, meeting to knit outside on their public library's front lawn. Before the pandemic, the knitting group would meet at the Arnprior Public Library and "would sit around the electric fireplace with cups of coffee to share stories, knitting techniques and materials, hear from a librarian about the latest books and, as they put it, solve the world's problems" (Dunn 2020).

Apart from the What Knots news story, news reporters framed the transformation of library space within technological contexts, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that technological mediators are needed to connect us as physical gatherings remain unsafe. The near-unanimous framing of public libraries as still being "open 24/7" or "available" or "accessible" or "free" in their virtual forms (e.g., "the digital library is always accessible and available for free" [Martin-Robbins 2020]), however, overlooks and excludes those for whom digital access is not an option, whether for cost, knowledge, geographic location regarding internet access, and so forth.[2] This is counter to the ideals of social inclusion and equal access to information and the relationship between social inclusion and public libraries and its functions in diminishing the digital divide, which Ragnar Audunson and colleagues (2019) noted as chief topics in the context of the public sphere and public libraries. Furthermore, as Setha Low and Alan Smart (2020) explored in their thoughts about changing public spaces during the pandemic, our near-exclusive focus on tech-mediated social interactions omits a consideration of the unpredictability and inclusiveness that public spaces, including libraries, foster: "These are the places where we encounter other people who we may not necessarily know and where contact and connection occurs in a more open, democratic, inclusive and yet unpredictable way" (2). Although the role and the value of public libraries have been previously reassessed, given our use and reliance on digital technologies (see, e.g., Aabø 2005), this negotiation of the library's space as a strictly digital space during COVID-19 presents new tensions to critically consider.

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2. There does appear to be some geographic variation, with news stories reporting on public libraries in rural locations revealing the ways in which rural public libraries are meeting the internet needs of their communities, which may have additional difficulties in accessing high-speed internet (not only because of their remote locales but also because of closures of schools, another space where their communities seek internet access).

(Re)Configuring the Library's Roles

Alongside the (involuntary) reconsideration of what a library is (and can be), if not an open physical space, came an awareness and reconfiguration of the role of the library and library staff—in a pandemic and beyond. And in the newspaper articles explored, this reflection occurred among those involved in library management, who were the key figures interviewed, quoted, and represented as being concerned about negative social implications of physical space closure. As one article detailed, "'We're more than just some reading material,' said Troy Myers, chief librarian of South Shore Public Libraries. 'So we want to do what we can to make sure those social connections are maintained'" (Davie 2020). A common refrain emphasized that the role of the library goes well beyond the provision of material texts and media. This "more than books" refrain is in keeping with Featherstone and colleagues' (2008) eight categories of librarians' roles in disaster response: institutional supporters, collection managers, information disseminators, internal planners, community supporters, government partners, educators and trainers, and information community builders.[3] Indeed, several articles outlined the affective, or emotional, impact of library closures, using language of loss, pain, and yearning for what the library represents. In a column in a local paper, for example, one community member wrote, "A modern library—and the CPL [Cornwall (Ontario) Public Library], in particular—is more than just its collection of materials. It is a community space, a vital piece of social infrastructure, that builds up the people and community it serves; it enables them, strengthens them, unites them, and nourishes them. . . . For me, the absence of the CPL as a community space has been—and remains—a real void in my life" (Good 2020).

Within the collated articles, it was often suggested that, at least partially, it was the role of the library to fulfill these many community and patron needs, whether they be social, affective, or other. Jones (2020) echoes this in their examination of COVID's impact on library services, "At a moment when many feel isolated, the people part of libraries' value proposition—human connection—remains the most important" (955). In addition to the tangible roles that library staff members play, emergency situations reveal an intangible element—that is, the value of public libraries and the positive sentiments that the general public has for them, aided in part by the social trust that communities place in their public library (Grace and Sen 2013; Oliphant 2014). Several articles included quotations from people who philosophized about the role of the library as a socially conscious public institution, given the context of the pandemic. As an example, one article included this reflection by the CEO of the Calgary Public Library:

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3. These roles closely mirror those identified by John Carlo Bertot et al. (2006) and Lisl Zach and Michelynn McKnight (2010b), who focused on the ways in which public libraries supported their communities during and after the 2004 and 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes: helping communities prepare, providing emergency information, giving shelter, providing physical aid, caring for community members in need, working with relief organizations, and cleaning up the damage after the storms.

"Libraries are built to bridge divides. There are so many divides that are being laid bare right now in our community. A digital divide, a social divide, economic divide, systemic barriers to access and participation in the community and in the economy. . . . The library is a place of learning, a place of civil dialogue, civic dialogue. . . . It's a place of human connection. I can't think of a time when that's been more important" (A. Smith 2020).

Creative or adaptive strategies related to COVID-19 restrictions were framed as being important and valued because they helped patrons to maintain a comforting connection to the library. Examples of such strategies include things like friendly-calling services, curbside pick-up, virtual storytimes, and so forth:

> Reynolds said they were hoping to be open sometime soon, but now that looks unlikely, so they're continuing to find ways they can engage with people in their area. "We're trying to make it easy for families to find some ways to help keep their kids entertained because they're home when they're usually in school. . . . I actually just had a conversation with another staff branch manager who said, 'I want to call people, I want to read stories to kids over the phone, whatever I can do.' It's in the backs of our minds," she said. "The library misses them too." (Davie 2020)

Speaking about curbside pickup, one librarian noted, "I think it still makes them feel connected, especially now that they're going to be able to get their books from the library that they want. I think it will be a comfort for them to know that they're still connected to the library" (Casalino 2020). This focus on connection resonates with Jade Smith's (2020) assertion that COVID-19 has prompted a fluidity of infrastructure and among library staff within Australian libraries in response to shifting information and resourcing needs: "To continue operating during the pandemic, libraries are actively engaging with patrons as a source of hope, comfort and information during lockdown" (425). Many of the articles included in this study could be interpreted as offering similar support: comfort, via the maintenance or creation of access to familiar materials and virtual programming; information, either about the pandemic or about how best to navigate the pandemic; and hope, by highlighting our collective capacities to thrive despite adversity: "Some of you may not know all that a library can do for you. At this time we are in right now, it may just be the place that can lend you a hand with your communication, socialization and entertainment needs for FREE" (Gardiner 2020).

Throughout the articles studied, the library was positioned as the nurturer and provider and the bridger or equalizer. Epitomizing this were the many articles singing the praises of the library and the wide array of roles (e.g., services, supports, and opportunities for engagement) that libraries sought to play. A large proportion of the newspaper articles itemized the multitude of tasks that libraries and/or librarians have taken on, both before the pandemic and because of the conditions of the pandemic. One article's headline speaks to this, "All the things

the library has done for Halifax residents since shutting its doors for COVID-19", with the subtitle, "All hail the city's unofficial social worker" (McKenna 2020). The article outlined how library staff have worked to come up with "creative and innovative ways to uphold the ever-expanding responsibilities libraries hold in our communities" (McKenna 2020). However, this diversification and expansion of the public library, and librarian's roles therein, have not been without critique. Indeed, expansion of responsibilities is not without concern or potential consequence. It has led some to ask where the boundaries should lie—for example, what support(s) should a library, or library staff, offer compared with other social service organizations, public health agencies, educators, or so on. These questions preceded the onset of the pandemic but are heightened within crisis (or disaster) scenarios.

Other libraries and library systems have merely asked individual librarians to take on additional tasks and responsibilities as part of their day-to-day responsibilities. Library scholars and workers worry that this expansion could lead to undercompensation and disenfranchisement, if not burnout (Ettarh 2018). There is not a complete lack of consciousness about this among library management, as noted in this interview with a library CEO in a large city:

> Q: The library faces increasing strain from marginalized populations, including homeless and mentally ill. How will you deal with that in a COVID-19 environment?
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> A: I am hoping this crisis inspires some radical changes. Libraries have borne an unfair burden. So, citywide, I think we need to have a conversation about what we can do better to support our most vulnerable. We have three social workers and we do have a number of programs. . . . We're doing a lot of good work. But libraries across North America have to address these challenges and we need help. The research shows that libraries are more well-used when the economy is declining. If there are cuts to our budget, that will be tricky for us. We are very lean; any cut to us will be a cut to service. (Faulder 2020)

Underlying the message that libraries are consistently providing more services with fewer resources is that they are doing so while having to justify budgetary allocations and decisions. A number of news articles cited layoffs and furloughs of library staff that were instigated, and said to be necessitated, by the pandemic restrictions. Strikingly, often in the next paragraph, articles would then itemize the new and innovative resources, services, and offerings that the libraries were developing to ensure that connections were retained and the divide, so to speak, continued to be bridged. This is best demonstrated in the following example:

> HPL [Halifax Public Libraries] chief librarian and CEO Åsa Kachan appeared before regional council on Wednesday, in order to provide more info on what stays and what

goes in the proposed five percent trim of the library's budget for 2020/21. During the webcast meeting, Kachan told the councillors and mayor Mike Savage that she and her staff have been in full-response mode since C19 [COVID-19] arrived, helping the city while staying true to the library's purpose. . . . It's problem solving in real-time, with residents stuck at home but screaming for services, and it's working. "As we have pivoted," Kachan said, "the things we are doing are resonating with our community." (McKenna 2020)

The media articles thus uncritically presented libraries as consistently doing more and more with less and less, despite constraining and restrictive pandemic circumstances, and clearly sought to demonstrate the continued (if not increased) relevance of the public library during times of austerity.

(Re)Constructing "Others"

Seventy-nine news stories (36%) discussed new or changing library services, programs, or materials for a specific population or patron group. Three groups quickly and clearly emerged across the sample: older adults, children, and newcomers. Being explicitly labeled in these news articles, these three groups emerged as requiring or deserving services that might be different from other ("typical") library patrons.

These three groups were "othered" from the general library patron population based on a number of factors, most often and notably, lack of access to technology (older adults and newcomers), risk of becoming isolated (older adults), or need to supplement learning and playtime opportunities (children). However, this frame of othering was differently articulated among these three groups and had different assumptions and implications.

As the following quotes illuminate, both older adult and newcomer populations were constructed as having both vulnerability and deficits, with access to library services or resources framed as shoring these deficits:

- "'Since making the shift to offer more services and programs online, Crosby said Halifax Public Libraries has done its best to reach newcomers, but a lack of internet access has made it tough to make some connections. . . . What this pandemic has made apparent is that internet connectivity is lacking for a lot of our most vulnerable parts of our population, and that includes many of our newcomers who are often living in subsidized housing, and when they first arrive, don't have employment, so it's been more of a struggle to connect with folks who can't get online easily,' she said" (Ziafati 2020).

- "'We have folks that are considered most vulnerable. A quick example of that are seniors who are home-bound and require those reading materials or they're not tech savvy and can't download our e-books,' Myers said" (Davie 2020).
- "'We have a lot of seniors, particularly at the Riverside branch, who may be in the library once a week,' said Pope. 'They read magazines, check out books, but they're also there to socialize and avoid becoming isolated at home'" (Cross 2020).
- "So many of our seniors are in lockdown and could use some point of human connection. Another way to connect with your community is to sign up for our Pen Pal Club. Practise writing letters like the old-fashioned days after we set you up with a local pen pal" (Storey 2020).

When discussing child-aged patrons, however, library services, programs, materials, and/or events were framed as tools to elevate children's educational or pastime opportunities:

- "For all the parents now looking at different ways they can support their child's learning at home, consider the library. Even though our facilities are closed, we are open to serving you during this time. We can help you with the classic three Rs (writing, reading and arithmetic) and also with emerging, non-traditional ways of learning" (Storey 2020).
- "With the library and schools remaining closed to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forest of Reading offers lists of quality Canadian books. . . . We also offer Tumblebooks, an eBook and animated picture book service for children, if you are looking for more great reading for children while staying at home" (Michaluk 2020).
- "As well as library items, you can also now pick up craft kits for kids. A how-to video explaining the craft is available on our social media every Monday morning at 10 a.m. and kits with the supplies for that craft are also available for pickup. Just send us an email or give us a call, and we'll include a craft kit with your other items when you come to pick them up" (Hutton 2020).
- "Amber McNair, youth services librarian for Huntsville Public Library, said she has shifted from in-person children and teen programs, school and daycare visits, and information desk interactions to entirely online work. But she said offering new online programs, such as Virtual Storytime, Virtual LEGO Builders Club, Virtual Crafty Kids or Virtual StoryWalk, has helped isolated children and families remain connected" (Brownlee 2020a).

In addition, libraries were often mentioned in articles that aimed to help parents engage with their children, framing libraries as strategic and available boredom busters: "Five things to do with your kids in Waterloo Region during the COVID-19 pandemic"; "COVID-19: Bored kids? Check out these free Vancouver online resources"; "Having fun online isn't hard with a Toronto

public library card"; "Bored in isolation? 10 things you can do online with a Caledon library card." In alignment with public libraries' traditional focus on and privileging of children and youth (Dalmer 2017), the analyzed news stories provide details about fun, innovative, and vibrant materials or programming opportunities.

Although libraries are known to provide access to information and information technologies in addition to a wide array of cultural, educational, and entertainment opportunities, the ways in which these news stories were framed raise important questions regarding what "type" of patron is portrayed or interpreted as being in need of these different types of services and resources during times of crisis. Classifying patrons' needs based on one facet (whether age or newcomer status) can problematically erase the many intersecting complexities of patrons' everyday lives and may further entrench or reify stigmatization that underlies the categorizations.

The ways in which different patron groups are framed is especially important given the growing research that examines how public libraries serve at-risk and vulnerable communities during times of crises and civil unrest (see, e.g., Renate Chancellor's 2019 analysis of the instrumental roles of the Ferguson Municipal Public Library and the Baltimore Public Library following the police shooting of Michael Brown and the death of Freddie Gray, respectively). This line of research confirms findings from David P. Moxley and June M. Abbas (2016), who note that "increasingly, libraries serve as community anchors for at-risk and vulnerable populations, including people who are unemployed, immigrating or seeking refuge, homeless or in re-entry from incarceration" (311). The ways in which certain patron populations are framed highlights the importance of research in this area, given that these population groups become even more vulnerable in emergencies or times of unrest and are often excluded in risk communication and community engagement during crises or disaster situations.

Discussion

Existing library-focused disaster management research has outlined the traditional roles and expectations of library staff and libraries, many of which align with Subramaniam and Braun's (2021) seven different types of services offered by American public libraries in the spring and summer of 2020: program provider, information provider, access provider, social support, community partner, producer and supplier, and community space. These service types were present throughout the news stories analyzed in this study. Importantly, though, using frame analysis to analyze news stories, we were able to identify findings not yet present in research examining the relationships between COVID-19 and public libraries. The three media frames identified—(re)negotiating the library's space, (re)configuring the library's roles, and (re)constructing "others"—highlight the changes that the COVID-19 physical distancing mandates have had on public library roles and spaces and how these roles and spaces are differently enacted or interpreted for different library patrons. As such, the frames identified in this study cannot be isolated because they have interactive effects. The renegotiation of the library's physical space

as a "24/7, accessible" digital space, as identified in the first frame, implicates the third frame of reconstructing others.[4] The othering of patrons (framing older adults and newcomer immigrants with a deficit-based lens and children with an asset-based lens) corresponds with assumptions surrounding digital access and/or digital savviness. Older adults are generally assumed to have poor technology knowledge, newcomers are assumed to lack access to technology, and child patrons are assumed to have both access to digital technologies and the ability to use them (or have a care partner who can assist with navigating the myriad of online library programs).

It is crucial to acknowledge that the news stories primarily included or voiced the experiences of certain staff members. Drawing on Kitzinger (2007), Laura Funk et al. (2021) note that frame analysis "highlights the political nature of framing in relation to specific issues; politicians, experts, and activists struggle with one another to get their preferred frames before the public" (502). A majority of our analyzed news stories included quotations only from library administrators (library CEOs, directors, or managers) who act either as experts of the experiences of their library or library system or as relaying public relations–type messaging. As part of the news story framing process, journalists seek out and feature particular voices over others. Although these voices may potentially be well informed about the intricacies of library funding and priorities, it is imperative to acknowledge those whose voices are absent (e.g., frontline workers, marginalized staff, patrons), particularly as library practices continue to shift in response to COVID-19. The absence of those voices provides a particular framing of the library that reaches the public audience. In addition, the centralized ownership of media across Canada affects whose voices are included and amplified (or excluded), shaping the framing of the stories told within. As a supplement to this analysis, future research might consider how independent media sources depict public libraries.

A consequence of including and quoting certain voices over others is the omission of the experiences and work of certain individuals or groups. This deliberate inclusion of library administration voices erases opportunities for library workers to voice their experiences, both positive and negative. This lack of diversity of voices and experiences can perpetuate "vocational awe" among library workers, upholding neoliberal working conditions. Coined by Fobazi Ettarh (2018), vocational awe is described as "the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good, sacred notions, and therefore beyond critique." Ettarh has argued that vocational awe underpins known problems in the profession, including burnout, undercompensation, and job creep—the slow and subtle expansion of job duties, often not recognized by supervisors or the organization. This situation has manifested in the library realm in many ways. Prepandemic

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4. Accordingly, future research on this topic could explore how the renegotiation of the library's space during the COVID-19 pandemic is shifting understandings and subjective experiences of the library as place and how this shift might be differently experienced among patron groups (see Buschman and Leckie's 2007 edited collection for a more comprehensive articulation of the intersections between libraries, space, and place).

examples include emergency medicine provision (naloxone and overdose prevention), job and skills training for the unemployed, homelessness support, and support for newcomers. While not exhaustive, examples presented by the pandemic include the development and distribution of homeschooling and/or distance learning materials, friendly-calling programs, social connector/mental health support, internet provision beyond the norm (strengthening Wi-Fi signals, enhancing lending of mobile hotspots), 3-D printing (for personal protective equipment), and food security programming and services. These roles and services were all highlighted and championed in the media articles but without a critical eye to whether or to what degree these services should be performed by library workers. As Ettarh (2018) argues, "Without the proper training and institutional support that first responders, social workers, and other clinicians have, librarians, through job creep, are being asked to do increasingly dangerous emotional and physical labor without the tools and support provided to other professions traditionally tasked with these duties." As the news stories depict (and largely celebrate) libraries and library workers as doing more and more for their communities (often, with fewer resources at their disposal), they inevitably heighten the expectations of the public. Without the inclusion and representation of all library workers in news stories, we contend that burnout, undercompensation, and job creep might continue to swell without question or pause.

Conclusion

As this article has revealed, in responding to COVID-19-linked challenges, it is helpful to consider data from outside library sources, as they identify elements not previously explored (e.g., affective dimensions). As COVID-19 continues to evolve and necessarily engenders difficult decisions for library administrators, staff members, patrons and surrounding communities, future research may similarly take up frame analysis to illuminate not only how media represents public libraries' decisions and practices but also how framing in news stories might influence public perception and understanding of social institutions, including public libraries.

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