Care, social infrastructures, and technologies: Intertwining of gerontology and LIS

My name is Nicole Dalmer – I am currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health, Aging and Society at McMaster University (Ontario, Canada). I am also the Associate Director of McMaster University's Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging. While my current position has me deeply steeped in social and critical gerontology, my academic and professional background is rooted in Library and Information Sciences – I received my MLIS from the University of Alberta and my PhD in Library and Information Sciences from The University of Western Ontario. As a doctoral student, I created and developed a graduate-level course that examined the role of community infrastructures, including public libraries, in responsively engaging and advocating with older adult populations, the first course of its kind in a Canadian MLIS program. My postdoctoral training at Trent University was focused on the sociology of aging, examining, in particular, the ways in which older adults use and integrate different technologies into their everyday lives.

My research interests are necessarily transdisciplinary and lie at the intersections of a critical examination of aging in place, the social organization of care work, and the implications of gerontechnological optimism. Given my training, teaching, and publication record which reflect my interests at the intersection of gerontology and LIS, I am well positioned to be an active member and contributor to this workshop. I am able to participate only in the online discussion (I am not able to be present for the in-person workshop, unfortunately).

My research program and history are grouped around three themes that directly relate to the workshop's focus on the entanglements of aging and information:
1. Contributions of information work to family care work: Centered around my doctoral work, I use an institutional ethnographic method of inquiry and arts-based mapping exercises to make visible the information work that permeates the care work of families of people living with dementia who are also aging at home. As aging in place fulfills an economic imperative and is increasingly a part of countries' policy responses to grapple with the rising number of older adults, it behooves us to understand how information practices and information tools support older adults to age in a place in a manner that works best for them. Publications associated with this theme include:
   - Dalmer, N. K. (2020). 'Add info and stir': An institutional ethnographic scoping review of family caregivers' information work. *Ageing & Society, 40*(3), 663-689.
   - Dalmer, N. K., & Huvila, I. (2019). Conceptualizing information work for health contexts in Library and Information Science. *Journal of Documentation, 76*(1), 96-108.
   - Dalmer, N. K. (2018). *Informing care: Mapping the social organization of families' information work in an aging in place climate*. Doctoral thesis. The University of Western Ontario.
   - Dalmer, N. (2017). Information world mapping to explicate the information-care relationship in dementia care. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 54*(1), 647–649.

2. Aging and the role of social infrastructures (i.e. public libraries) in supporting social inclusion. This research theme is supported by a SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) Insight Development Grant "Aging in Place with Public Libraries: Mobilizing Social Infrastructures for Social Inclusion". Library and information science (LIS) scholars have demonstrated the importance of public libraries as hubs of sociocultural connection, with relationships between patrons, library staff, and the surrounding community cultivating social capital and reducing social isolation. Gerontology researchers have highlighted sociocultural links as having a measurable, positive impact on older adults' physical and mental wellbeing, including bolstering feelings of social inclusion. Despite the clear intersection between these findings, there is little synergy between gerontology and LIS. What remains unknown is the landscape of public library spaces, services, and materials for older adults and how these collectively impact older adults' experiences of social inclusion – this grant seeks to explore this unknown. Publications associated with this theme include:

   - Dalmer, N. K. & Mitrovica, B. (In press). The public library as social infrastructure for older patrons: Exploring the implications of online library programming for older adults during COVID-19. *Library and Information Science Research*.
   - Dalmer, N. K., Griffin, M., Wynia Baluk, K., & Gillett, J. (2020). Aging in (third) place with public libraries. *Public Libraries, 59*(4), 22 – 30.
   - Dalmer, N. K., & Campbell, D. G. (2020). Communicating with library patrons and people with dementia: Tracing an ethic of care in professional communication guidelines. *Dementia*, *19*(3), 899-914.
   - Rothbauer, P., & Dalmer, N. K. (2018). Reading as a lifeline among aging readers: Findings from a qualitative interview study with older adults for library and information science research. *Library and Information Science Research, 40*(3-4), 165-172.
   - Dalmer, N. K. (2017). Mind the gap: Towards the integration of critical gerontology in public library praxis. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies, 1*(1).

3. Aging and the role of information technologies: Conversations about aging populations often trade in alarmist demographic predictions of a 'silver tsunami' with dire consequences for the distribution of social resources and intergenerational collaboration. Yet optimism is also pinned on new technologies that might produce more positive aging futures by lessening health-care burdens, empowering resilient capacities, encouraging risk-averse lifestyles and enabling 'aging in place'. Research associated with this theme investigates fundamental changes in the contemporary experiences of later life, at the intersection of digital infrastructures, place and the experience of 'being connected'.  We are exploring the role of a variety of digital devices in later life, making visible the ways that self-tracking technologies and digital apps are used to create new modes and styles of measuring, calculating, storing and sharing information about the aging self. Publications associated with this theme include:

- Dalmer, N. K., Ellison, K. L., Katz, S., & Marshall, B. L. (2022). Ageing, embodiment and datafication: Dynamics of power in digital health and care technologies. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life, 15*(2). doi.org/10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.3499
- Hussein, T., Chauhan, P., Dalmer, N. K., Rudzicz, F., & Boger, J. (2020). Exploring interface design to support caregivers' needs and feelings of trust in online content. *Journal of Rehabilitation and Assistive Technologies Engineering* (JRATE). doi.org/10.1177/2055668320968482

I have also recently taken an interest in understanding how older adults seek out and use information to guide and inform their sexual health. The following publication is evidence of this recent research interest:

- Dalmer, N. K. & Marshall, B. L. (2022). The role of information in later life sexuality: An invitation for further exploration. *The Gerontologist*. doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnac059

I am very eager to be part of this workshop. I am interested, for example, in having thoughtful conversations regarding how we wish to approach our thinking about "successful" aging – taking into consideration some of the potentially unfavourable consequences of using the "successful aging" conceptualization (see, for example, Martinson, M., & Berridge, C. (2015). Successful aging and its discontents: A systematic review of the social gerontology literature. *The Gerontologist*, *55*(1), 58-69 or Rubinstein, R. L., & de Medeiros, K. (2015). "Successful aging," gerontological theory and neoliberalism: A qualitative critique. *The Gerontologist*, *55*(1), 34-42.)

Thank you for your consideration – I am so looking forward to engaging in these much-needed conversations at the intersection of aging and information.

-Nicole