

Baby boomers, their elders and the public library

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Library Review

ISSN: 0024-2535

Publication date: 31 August 2012

Abstract

Purpose

Canada's aging population is expected to have an impact on all public institutions; for public libraries, the emergence of a large, multi-generational user group of older adults challenges the current paradigm of services to seniors. The purpose of this paper is to report on the reflections of a small sample of baby boomers and how the public library-as-place contributes to their caring relationships with their elders.

Design/methodology/approach

This study examined a subset of baby boomer library patrons who are in caring relationships with elders. The study is theoretically framed by the ethic of care and emerging theories of library-as-place grounded in human geography and sociology. An instrumental case study of seven carers in an urban Canadian city was conducted, using long form interviews.

Findings

Findings suggest that while these baby boomer respondents value their libraries deeply, there is potential to create services and practices more attuned to the needs of older adults who are in relationships with elders.

Research limitations/implications

As a single case of a small sample of baby boomers, this study is limited by its size, scope and geography. The direct voices of the elders could not practically be incorporated into this study and should be considered in future research.

Originality/value

This study offers an alternate framework to library-as-place studies based on a specific profile of "older adult" library users. It examines the library needs and uses of a small but rapidly growing sector of many public library communities. Older adults can be seen by libraries as two distinct demographic groups – the very old (elders) and their younger peers (baby boomers).

Keywords

Canada Baby boomer generation Public libraries Elderly people Elders Library users Ethic of care Library as place

Citation

Cavanagh, M.F. and Robbins, W. (2012), "Baby boomers, their elders and the public library", *Library Review*, Vol. 61 No. 8/9, pp. 622-640. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00242531211292114>

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My Library Dashboard. Today and in the not too distant future, it will be Baby Boomers versus Millennials. In *The Next America* by Paul Taylor and the Pew Research Center, Taylor lays out through facts and figures, the demographics of our future America and the widening social gap between the two largest living generations, Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Millennials (born after 1980). Taylor writes, "Millennials and Baby Boomers are the lead characters in a looming generational showdown by dint of their vast number and strategic location in the life cycle." More than 10,000 Baby Boomers are – Findings suggest that while these baby boomer respondents value their libraries deeply, there is potential to create services and practices more attuned to the needs of older adults who are in relationships with elders. Research limitations/implications. – As a single case of a small sample of baby boomers, this study is limited by its size, scope and geography. The direct voices of the elders could not practically be incorporated into this study and should be considered in future research. Originality/value. – This study offers an alternate framework to library-as-place studies based on a s... Older adults can be seen by libraries as two distinct demographic groups – the very old (elders) and their younger peers (baby boomers). Keywords. Canada. Baby boomers are the demographic cohort following the Silent Generation and preceding Generation X. The generation is generally defined as people born from 1946 to 1964, during the post-World War II baby boom. The baby boom has been described variously as a "shockwave" and as "the pig in the python." Baby boomers are often parents of late Gen Xers and Millennials. Other baby boomers "dropped out" of political life altogether. These "hippies" grew their hair long, experimented with drugs, and—thanks to the newly-accessible birth-control pill—practiced "free love." Some even moved to communes, as far away from Levittown as they could get. Baby Boomers Today. Today, the oldest baby boomers are already in their 60s. By 2030, about one in five Americans will be older than 65, and some experts believe that the aging of the population will place a strain on social welfare systems. Citation Information. Baby Boomers were able to build their own homes using developers who were now using faster methods to building homes. There are many differences in Baby Boomers and the world around them, but one thing is clear. This large generation will tax the health care system like none before it. And, while their sheer number will play an important role in that, they will also have different views on what type of care is acceptable to them and for their needs.