CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Stories Not Statistics:

An Autoethnographical & Narrative Exploration

of the Value of Public Libraries

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Contents

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"Hello. This book wishes you well. It wishes you the world. It wishes you somewhere warm, safe, well-lit, thoughtful, free, wide open to everybody, where you'll be surrounded by books and all the different possible ways of reading them. It wishes you fierceness and determination if anyone or anything threatens to take away your open access to place, space, time, thought, knowledge. It wishes you libraries – endless public libraries."

~ Introductory paragraph from Public Library & Other Stories, Ali Smith (Smith, 2016)

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1. Abstract

Public libraries in the United Kingdom have faced significant closures since the introduction of austerity in 2010, with this trend predicted to continue due to economic shortfalls resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The current tools used to measure the value of UK libraries are crude, insufficient and grounded in competitive market values that focus on numbers, downloads, and foot traffic. Better methods and metrics are needed to capture and express the true social value and potential of public library services.

This research project examines what the narratives around libraries reveal about the ways in which they are valued and explores the use of methods that are still relatively new to the field of LIS, attempting to reframe the narrative of the public library. Using thematic content analysis, autoethnography, and narrative inquiry to uncover themes of belonging and loneliness, we find that the physical building matters, that current economic and quantitative ways of measuring performance and allocating funding are inadequate, and that to truly move towards accurate measures of value we require new ways of knowing and appraising the libraries' contribution to society. An additional emergent theme is uncovered concerning the 'body', where our bodies belong, and how experiences of belonging are connected to experiences of loneliness; interrelated connections to vulnerable and marginalised groups are unearthed; and a new knowledge, one of survival, becomes apparent.

It is also revealed that there is a gap in the current LIS scholarship on work that draws together narratives of belonging, loneliness and the body in relation to the public library with the use of autoethnography and narrative inquiry specifically, and that using narratives to understand and

articulate impact should be key to understanding the value of libraries. There is a call for us to use these tools to reach further into new kinds of co-created knowledges, and collective autobiographies and autoethnographies, and in doing so, highlight the value of the public library and advocate for survival – not just survival of the public library building, but survival of the individual too.

These methods could join the many already used when resisting the closure of public libraries in the UK, and could also add to the qualitative, methodological, and theoretical tools used within the field of LIS.

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I am also deeply grateful to the long list of public libraries whose spaces helped me write this, for saving me, and for all the values they represent. A full list is included as Appendix A.

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3. Research Question & Introduction

This research project seeks to address the question: what can a study of the narratives around public libraries in the UK reveal about the ways in which they are valued, and how can we use the tools of autoethnography and narrative inquiry to uncover themes of belonging and loneliness in these value narratives?

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Public libraries in the United Kingdom have been closing at an average rate of 77 per year since the introduction of austerity in 2010 (Flood, 2019). It is predicted that in the current COVID-19 recession – a global economic crisis already more severe than the Great Recession that was used as justification for austerity in the early 21st Century – many more will close as a direct result of

budget hits (Flood, 2020) with a council funding shortfall as big as £2bn predicted in the current financial year alone (CIPFA, 2020, p.10). As a statutory service that is free at the point of use and thus not subjected to the same profit-driven ideals that most other public services are under neoliberal agendas, difficulties arise when measuring value, as footfall and membership numbers are not keeping them funded, staffed and open. We now require alternative ways to measure the value of the library than those grounded in competitive market values. As Leeke (2019) shows us when reflecting on a study of the 'real impact' of Suffolk Libraries, "we could see that every day, activities hosted by libraries create positive change for people. But we had no independent evidence to prove this and as a result, no way of demonstrating our value to key stakeholders and funders."

Lauersen (2020) agrees. "Library statistics are important but lending numbers, downloads and foot traffic says something about the *use* of libraries but not really much about the *value* and *impact* that libraries bring to communities. You cannot see the role libraries play in fighting inequality, polarization and loneliness from a spreadsheet." I argue in this study that not only are we measuring value with the tools that are not fit for purpose, but also that the reason it is important to acknowledge this, is that there is an immeasurably profound social value in having a community building that provides information, connection to others, essential resources, and other crucial public and civic services, all for free, to all citizens regardless of background, personal situation, nationality, age, gender, sexuality, financial status, or any other social or visible identity determinant. The physical building matters: it is a space that practices and represents inclusion and belonging for everybody. As I have suggested before (Dodd, 2020), as society increases its dependence on digital solutions and e-governance for civic participation, retaining these spaces becomes even more urgent, so that we may avoid leaving any citizens behind or further marginalising and excluding those already underserved by society, politics, and civic systems. Public libraries attracted over 225 million in-person visits in 2014-15 – they are clearly still needed and valued (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2017).

To briefly tackle the economic angle, which is a large part of how the argument against the continued public funding of the public library building has been framed to date: if this is what policymakers seek in order to make the case for ongoing funding, then the data is already out there. In fact, the existence of the public library building, including its resources and staff, is very clearly evidenced to add to a local economy rather than drain it. The Suffolk Libraries case study (Leeke, 2019) shows that "not only are libraries a rallying point for those who have been lost in an ever more remote world, but they also have a significant positive effect on wider public health" as they improve health outcomes, a claim that will be built on in the Literature

Review. This demonstrates something that a large number of librarians know from experience – people who use the public library are healthier, both physically and mentally, therefore come at a lower economic cost to the national public purse. In addition, as I have shown before, an individual that is able to engage in job and CV surgeries at their local library has a higher chance of finding gainful employment, thus contributing to the economy (Dodd, 2020), and supporting this is evidence that finding and retaining work after long-term unemployment can alleviate negative mental health symptoms and conditions and contribute to an ongoing higher level of health overall (Mental Health Foundation, 2012). In another example, a study of economic value carried out on Bolton Borough Councils libraries in 2005, it was found that "relative to the amount of public funding it receives, Bolton's museums, libraries and archives generate 1.6 times the value of this funding … Alternatively if public funding for Bolton's museums, libraries and archives were to end the Bolton economy would lose net benefits of £3.9 million" (Jura Consultants, 2005). Finally, on the economic value of libraries, it was found in the Suffolk Libraries study that three of their core activities alone "generate just under £2m of social value every year. This is the total saving to individuals and stakeholders such as the NHS after all costs are considered. Or for every £1 spent on the three library activities, the county [Suffolk] gets back over £8 of social value" (Leeke, 2019). But these numbers are precisely what this study seeks to move away from. We need stories, not statistics.

There have been multiple studies of library projects that alleviate loneliness and increase belonging in the United Kingdom. There are also a multitude of narratives, theories and testimonies on the sociological and emotional value of the physical library building and their non-commercialised, all-inclusive function in society. However, as yet there is a dearth of research in the field of LIS that pulls these narratives together and views them through the lenses of autoethnography and narrative inquiry, using content analysis to filter and discover these key narrative themes. As we will see further on in the study, these methods are underused within LIS, and utilising them in this study may be interesting for both LIS and in the general societal conversations around the value of the public library, potentially enhancing the shared knowledges that we co-create on the subject of the public library.

> *"…librarians are frontline workers used to dealing with the mentally ill, the disenfranchised, homeless, the lonely, and vulnerable. A librarian is often the only person someone might see all day … They are part counsellor, social worker, listening ear, facilitator, events planner and friend (Thompson, 2021).*

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4. Scope & Definitions

The study concentrates on public libraries in the United Kingdom since the turn of the 21st Century (2000 – present day). Public libraries only are analysed, not public archives. Only English-language resources are consulted. It is restricted to the United Kingdom because as the literature search will reveal there are already many existing studies on the global situation, though within these there are a small number of in-depth papers relevant to the scope of this study, one of which has been included, covering much of the ground we are looking at here.

The 'narratives' analysed are systematic reviews, case studies, and academic papers, plus reports that are written by public library services, their local government and/or community partners, and/or national library advocacy organisations and other associated bodies, about both the uses and users of public libraries in the United Kingdom, centering on the voices and testimonies of users and staff members. An autobiographical autoethnography will form a section of the narrative also, and be used to draw knowledges from the previous narratives, in an attempt to create new knowledges.

Using the above approaches and parameters made deliverability feasible and realistic. The hope is that, should this study prove to be informative and useful, it may be reproduced on a more in-depth or granular level for specific areas in the United Kingdom, e.g. defined local authority and council areas; for different user groups other than 'adults', or; with different data to make similar arguments for other causes or phenomena.

> *"The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man." ~ TS Eliot (Bausells, 2014)*

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5. Aims & Objectives

In order to clarify the aims and objectives of this project, Carter and Little's paper on epistemological and methodological choices in qualitative research (2007, p.2) is used here as a framework for defining and justifying the choices this study makes. The epistemological claim is that crude economic measurements of value are not sufficient knowledge to articulate and understand what libraries are and what their value is; the methodology used, as a theory of how the research should proceed, is to combine a range of approaches for understanding the value of the public library; and the techniques for gathering evidence that are used in pursuit of this

methodology are autoethnography and content analysis. This is then underpinned by theory through the framework of narrative inquiry.

These choices are made in an attempt to create a new kind of knowledge, one that plugs the gap in the current discourse around the value of public libraries that, as we will see in the literature review, Frandsen et al (2021) suggest exists. This is done as follows:

i. Literature Search & Review: finding and analysing narratives with themes of belonging and loneliness in relation to public libraries, by conducting the following:
   - A search of the main LIS-related academic database LISTA was conducted (Tables 1, 2 & 3 below). Due to time constraints, no other academic databases were consulted – this is an area for future expansion of the study.
   - Database searches of the following three main publicly available national library advocacy sites: CILIP, the UK's library and information association; Libraries Connected, a national charity and membership organisation working towards representation of all public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and Public Libraries News, an exhaustive and long-standing blog site documenting all news relating to public libraries.

   All results are subjected to screening and filtered based on relevance, with resulting documents being the ones subjected to literature review and content analysis. The search was concluded on 1st September, the review was concluded on 19th September.
ii. Analysing the narratives from the literature review simultaneously alongside the review, using thematic content analysis. Research software NVivo 12 is utilised for this part of the study. The original codes the themes were generated from are included as Appendix C. Data analysis was concluded on 24th September.
iii. Adding an autobiographical autoethnography to the narratives from the content analysis.
iv. Underpinning the study using narrative inquiry to inform a theoretical positioning.

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6. Literature Search

This section details the specific methods used in the literature search, with their results, which then informs the Literature Review that follows.

6.1 LISTA Database

Table 1

Search 1 – Boolean **Belonging OR loneliness AND public libraries OR public library**

Parameters	Choices	Reasoning/Notes
Expanders:	Apply related words Also search within the full text of the articles Apply equivalent subjects	All available choices utilised
Limiters:	Full text only	Need the full text if post-screening the document makes it into the final literature review and content analysis
Date range:	January 2000 – December 2021	Matches study scope
Language:	English	Authors only language spoken; country/scope specific
Publication type:	Academic journal Periodical Reference book Trade publication	All available choices utilised
Document type:	Article Book Case study Conference paper Dissertation Report	Excluded: bibliography, book report, correction notice, editorial, entertainment review, film review, interview, patent, proceeding and product review – none of these choices were either not relevant to the aims and scope of the study, or would not include enough detail to analyse fully in the literature review or content analysis
Publisher:	All included	All available choices utilised
Returned: 59,502 results		
Subject Area:	Public libraries (7,270) Library public services (2,881) Libraries and community (1,157) Great Britain (934) Public institutions (931) Financing of public libraries (467)	There were over 100 more choices available on the subject area list. They were excluded for multiple reasons: they did not reference public libraries specifically and only libraries; they directly referenced other types of libraries not relevant to this study; they were for areas within library provision that were not relevant (e.g. children); or they focussed on countries outside of the United Kingdom.
Reduced results returned down to: 12,130 (1,510 were duplicates and keyword-tagged twice in the results)		

Table 2

Search 2 – Boolean. Edited version of Search 1: details below		
Parameters	**Choices**	**Reasoning/Notes**
Expanders REMOVED:	Also search within the full text of the articles Apply equivalent subjects	Retaining: Apply related words. Reason: more specific to the scope of the study; brings results down; related words are important as possible synonyms may have been overlooked
Limiters:	Full text only	Remained the same
Date range:	January 2000 – December 2021	Remained the same
Language:	English	Remained the same
Publication types REMOVED:	Periodical Reference book Trade publication	Retaining: Academic journal. Reason: they are less uniform in presentation and content than an academic article, therefore arguably quicker in a time-limited context to synthesise and analyse via literature review and content analysis; they are less likely to contain examples of narratives and library user quotes pertaining to the specific scope and keywords of the study.
Document types:	The option to further narrow the document type list disappeared from the EBSCO interface at this point, so all document types were added back in. This meant the full list of documents were now included was:	The previously included: article, book, case study, conference paper, dissertation, report; and the previously excluded: bibliography, book report, correction notice, editorial, entertainment review, film review, interview, patent, proceeding, product review
Subject Areas REMOVED:	Great Britain Public institutions	The country is not specific to public libraries and could be any type of library; the public institutions could refer to any institution, not just public libraries
Returned: 3,180 results		

Table 3

Search 3 – Boolean. Edited version of Search 2: details below **Belonging OR loneliness AND public libraries. Change: 'OR public library' removed**		
Parameters	**Choices**	**Reasoning/Notes**
Expanders:	As in Search 2	Remained the same
Limiters:	As in Search 2	Remained the same
Date range:	As in Search 2	Remained the same

Language:	As in Search 2	Remained the same
Publication type:	As in Search 2	Remained the same
Document type:	The option to narrow down by document type now reappeared, so this time Search 1 parameters were used with one further document type removed: conference papers.	Any conference reports in existence will be generated from other documents that, if the correct metadata is used, will already appear in the results list.
Subject Area:	As in Search 2	Remained the same
Returned: 7 results		

Of these seven final results, two are included in the final literature review and thematic content analysis that follows. Many of the parameter choices made above may appear narrow but in reality, afforded the study a specificity that adhered to the research question and scope. However, an acknowledged limitation is that due to time constraints, a more in-depth search of multiple academic databases and individual journals was not conducted, nor were reference lists or co-citations analysed. It is highly probable that there are more studies available that are relevant to this study, but they did not enter the net of the final search due to this. If this study were to take place on a larger scale, these methods would feature.

6.2 Libraries Connected // CILIP // Public Libraries News

Libraries Connected: 'Public libraries' was not used as a search term because that is the websites speciality, so there was no need to specify this. This website can only be searched by one keyword at a time, with no filter functionality.

- 'Loneliness' returned 18 results across two pages. Of these, two were relevant, both made it through screening into the literature review and content analysis.
- 'Belonging' returned zero results.

CILIP: 'Public libraries' was not used as a search term as there is no functionality on the website allowing for this – rather, all results across multiple categories from the two keywords were screened and filtered based on relevance to the scope of the study and the document type.

- Keyword 'loneliness' returned 23 results, of which 2 were relevant; keyword 'belonging' returned 29 results, of which 4 were relevant.
- All six documents made it past screening and into the literature review and content analysis.

Public Libraries News: 'Public libraries' was not used as a search term because that is the websites speciality, so there was no need to specify this. This website can only be searched by

one keyword at a time, with no filter functionality. Two documents made it past screening and into the literature review and content analysis, as follows:

- 'Loneliness' returned six pages of results. Within each of these pages there were over 30 resources, and across those, 37 used the keyword 'loneliness'. Two of these were relevant after screening, though one was a duplicate having already appeared in the CILIP search conducted prior.
- 'Belonging' returned two pages of results. Within each of these pages were over 30 resources, and across those, eight used the keyword 'belonging'. Two of these eight were relevant, but again, one was a duplicate and had already appeared.
- Across all eight of these pages, results that were local authority records, news articles, blogs or opinion pieces were excluded: this returned hundreds of results that would need screening, which was unfeasible for the project timescale; additionally, only the same document types as included in the LISTA search were considered, to ensure uniformity across the four total searches.

A note on these search parameters and results: it is highly probable that many more resources within all three of these websites also mention loneliness or belonging in relation to public libraries. However, if this is the case then the keywords were not in the main title or metadata, which suggests that those phenomena are not a main focus of these resources if they do exist.

To summarise the literature search, all resources found across the academic database search plus the three publicly available websites were skim-read then screened, followed by full-text readings of the items relating specifically to the British library system, and global studies that reference the British system, in keeping with the scope. In total, 12 relevant resources were found and analysed via full-text readings in the literature review and thematic content analysis – a bibliographic index of these final documents is included at the end of this study as Appendix D. All searches are replicable, and a list of permalinks and URLs to each is included at the end of this study as Appendix E. Some of the sources found and analysed are grey literature, this is neither good nor bad in and of itself but does highlight that there may well be more grey literature relevant to this search had more keywords or synonyms been used in the search methodology. Grey literature can greatly contribute to the balancing of sources and empirical data and, if this project were to be replicated by again on a larger scale, methods would be employed to exploit and take advantage of the availability of much more literature, making for a larger and potentially richer study.

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7. Literature Review

The aim of this literature review is:

i. To examine the documentation found in the literature search for narratives of belonging and loneliness as they relate to public libraries in the UK in the 21st Century
ii. To summarise these records by looking at the main findings within each resource.
iii. To find any gaps within the literature
iv. To then feed into the thematic content analysis and theory that follows.

At the end of this section, it is hoped that a critical understanding of the key themes and issues is exhibited, and a pathway to the following thematic content analysis, autoethnography and theory, has begun to materialise.

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The area has already been systematically reviewed by Frandsen et al (2021) in a paper entitled "Library stories: a systematic review of narrative aspects within and around libraries." This is analysed to begin with, alongside the 12 resources found in the previous literature search. This study is generalised in terms of scope (global) but specifically relevant in terms of aims: "exploring narratives and stories for understanding and evaluating the library's worth" and presenting "a systematic review of the existing studies of libraries that use narrative approaches". It covers four academic databases up to and including April 2020, returning 2,096 results, of which 35 are included.

One of the main findings in the Frandsen et al (2021) study is that storytelling should be a "key component of impact assessment more broadly at heritage institutions," and that using storytelling to understand and articulate impact is key to understanding the intangible value of these services. They discovered that narrative approaches are rarely used in evaluations of the public library system, yet "introducing narratives would enable us to move from measurement to meaning." They also posit that rather than judging value from traditional forms of narrative, such as the fixed structures with beginnings, middle and ends, to really understand a community and what it needs, we should move into "living stories" – "incoherent, fragmented, non-linear, polyphonic and tension-filled stories" (Frandsen et al, 2021). We will look more at this idea in the autoethnography and theoretical positioning later on.

Lastly, they also predict that one of the trends in any future attempts to prove the value of public libraries will be collecting and presenting stories of change to use as evidence in impact evaluations. This study hopes to contribute something towards the methods for manifesting this.

A Manchester Libraries case study from 2020 (pre-pandemic), which compared two separate surveys that revealed broadly the same findings, showed that people across all demographic groups reported feeling less lonely and more connected as a direct result of their public libraries and the in-person services and events they offer. There was a correlation between areas of deprivation and levels of loneliness, with those in more deprived areas feeling lonelier and more often – underlining how crucial community resources like libraries are to these areas all the more starkly. Broadly, when those who reported experiencing feelings of loneliness 'often' or 'some of the time' were asked directly whether the library helps to reduce feelings of loneliness, 81% of 1,331 respondents said yes. People interviewed said the library is: an essential community resource, helps with their mental health, fosters a feeling of belonging to their community, gives them confidence, provides somewhere safe to spend time when on a low income, is a place to find information, and helps them to feel less alone (CIPFA, 2020).

In The Reading Agency's 'Read, Talk, Share' campaign, which built on two of their existing public reading programmes already delivered via libraries, they reached every branch library in England during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided nearly 70,000 social engagements designed to alleviate loneliness to vulnerable, lonely and isolated residents by teaming them up with reading volunteers via the local library or making collections and resources on mental health and wellbeing more widely available. The Reading Agency, along with the library staff at each individual branch and other local partners, reported more than 4 in 5 feeling more connected to other people and less lonely as a direct result of having engaged with the programme. The report concludes by committing to continue working with public libraries on initiatives that reduce loneliness, recognising the key role that libraries and their staff play in the community and how they are perfectly placed for reaching vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities. They especially note the increased need we will have for the public library building as we enter a period of recovery from the pandemic (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Libraries Connected published a report on how public libraries responded to lockdowns, looking at seven case studies of library services during this period, and aiming to explore the impact of libraries on: keeping communities connected, aiding health

and wellbeing outcomes by reducing loneliness, offering digital and mobile library services, supporting vulnerable local residents, and identifying gaps in service provision in other public sectors such as adult social care (Libraries Connected, 2020). Their aim was to underline the need for continued funding of public libraries and their staff. They found that during lockdown, libraries across the country increased their membership numbers, expanded their digital offerings (which although much needed, also highlighted the digital divide and those unable to get online without a public library), helped families cope, provided opportunities to connect with others, and reached brand new audiences of people not previously likely to have used the library. Additionally, some mobile library services were expanded or increased in order to reach more vulnerable or shielding people, as well as those with no one to talk to, no money, or no food. Crucially, these new offerings and initiatives increased the support available to lonely and isolated local residents, helped with mental health needs in the community, increased users' digital skills which aided belonging and lessened loneliness, and raised the library's profile within communities as places that offer support and connection with others. Going forward, they are most concerned about the impact of library closures with specific regard to "…people living alone, jobseekers, and households without internet/computer access" (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.16), and they are confident that the presence of a public library building with trained staff lessens loneliness in their communities and fosters feelings of belonging.

In multiple places throughout the same report, it states unequivocally that local library services had saved people's lives. Especially, the pandemic brought into sharp relief the needs of people who have no internet enabled devices or ability to communicate online, and that lockdown compounded their isolation. This highlights the continued need for the public library building as an open-to-all physical place of access and inclusion. One concern raised in conclusion was that the success of expanded home and digital library offerings during lockdowns may be used as justifications for future closures of public library services, but they also say in rejection of this that "libraries are … core agencies that regularly provide direct services and prevent the escalation of issues such as deprivation and loneliness" (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.46).

Across the remaining sources analysed, it was found that librarians and the presence of the physical library building improves a person's sense of belonging to their local community (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2007; CILIP, 2016; Libraries Deliver, 2018); they are considered by the public to be trusted, safe, neutral public places free from any commercialised or political agenda (CILIP, 2016; Libraries Deliver, 2018; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021); they anchor people in their communities and provide a sense of place and belonging – for all groups, but especially socially excluded, marginalised, and disadvantaged ones (Paul Hamlyn

Foundation, 2007; Libraries Deliver, 2018; Moore Kingston Smith, 2019; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021); and they create stronger, more resilient communities, lessening loneliness and increasing feelings of belonging as a result (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2007; Libraries Deliver, 2018; Moore Kingston Smith, 2019, Libraries Week, 2021a; Libraries Week, 2021b).

There were also repeated mentions of the value of information literacy and accessibility in a divided and underfunded civic arena, and the increasing need for easily accessible civic services such as benefits applications and housing assistance, especially as more and more services move online and away from council offices (Libraries Connected, 2019; Moore Kingston Smith, 2019). Suffolk Libraries in particular was able to demonstrably prove throughout their report that the public library building, and the activities and interventions run within, alleviated loneliness explicitly – especially for high-risk groups such as the elderly and people living with mental and physical health conditions and disabilities – and that the NHS benefitted materially and economically from their programmes. Crucially, in highlighting the long-lasting benefits of engagement with local libraries for lonely and isolated individuals, it was found that the outcomes from engagement with the interventions continued "growing in the lives of individuals even when they moved beyond attending sessions" (Moore Kingston Smith, 2019).

Interestingly and in accordance with this last statement, Cavanagh (2015) theorises that "the activity of [library] membership is an ongoing process of intentional association with a collective where the shared purpose is known and where actors engage in shared action. Belonging is an outcome of membership in that collective action. From the sociologist's perspective, when an individual intentionally joins a collective action, becoming another member of that shared action, their membership creates a relationship of structural belonging to the social group." This raises the question of, when continued interaction post-intervention does occur between library users, is this happening inside or outside of the library? An interesting area for further study could be finding out whether library activities and events create sustained and long-lasting friendship groups outside of the library and without the presence of library staff – and then looking at all the possibilities of what that could mean, both for the institution of the public library itself, and for related concepts of togetherness and collective belonging in society at large.

Sung, Hepworth and Ragsdell's investigation of community engagement in UK public libraries (2012) revealed that when citizen-journalism news agencies were founded and run for and by the community from within libraries, the community members who participated felt elevated

senses of belonging – both to their communities, as they were finding and reporting news to and for them – and to their libraries. This was reported to have been two-way – library staff themselves also felt a stronger sense of belonging to the communities they worked in and for, which in turn contributed to embedding a feeling of belonging in the library generally, both for library users and library staff. The studies authors observed that this created stronger community networks, and it is not unreasonable to argue that these networks could lead to higher levels of belonging, translating to lower levels of loneliness, in these communities. This study also found that both library memberships and visits climbed as a result of those community news agencies communicating the availability and benefits of the libraries they operated from, increasing awareness of and engagement with them, and reaching new groups of users. (Sung, Hepworth & Ragsdell, 2012).

There were also some interesting theories in the literature on how libraries contribute to 'inclusive economic growth,' where "positive economic outcomes are shared equally across all demographics" and libraries act as "digital anchor institutions" – something that is increasingly being recognised by planning and policy authorities as a method of democratising economic development in communities (Libraries Deliver, 2018, pp.10-13) and acknowledging the connections between employability and economic contribution, and civic and community inclusion, thereby lessening social divides and inequalities. This is another promising and interesting area for further study.

In conclusion, the literature review revealed, as was suspected, an overwhelming agreement across one systematic review, four case studies, six reports, and two journal articles, that public libraries in the United Kingdom reduce loneliness and increase feelings of belonging. It is also interesting that, even though the literature search techniques did not utilise covid-specific keywords or methods, a third of the 12 resources found and analysed were focused on the role of the public library in tackling loneliness *specifically* in relation to the pandemic, even though the timescale parameter for the search was over 20 years in length. It seems fair to conclude from this that there is a raised societal awareness since the beginning of the pandemic just 18 months ago (at the time of writing), of the crucial role the public library plays both in civic life and in communities in alleviating loneliness and fostering feelings of belonging amongst people and across communities, and a greater need or desire to analyse the institution of the public library in relation to these social phenomena since the pandemic began.

Our social and economic recovery from COVID-19 is an unavoidable topic at this point, given that at the time of writing, the United Kingdom is entering an unprecedented recession in order

to pay for the costs of the pandemic, and in times like these – more so since austerity began – services like libraries are often the first to go. All sources reviewed championed the public library as an institution that anchors a community and bridges social and other divides. However, those that focused on libraries in lockdown specifically all broadly agreed on one common statement: the public library building will be absolutely essential in our national recovery from the pandemic because they provide a space for interaction, access to civic services, connection in all its forms, skills sharing, storytelling, and improved health outcomes – all elements that contribute to easing loneliness, and fostering togetherness, collaboration and belonging between individuals across demographics within their communities. Throughout each of the 12 sources analysed, libraries were positioned as places of trust and belonging, and concerns were raised over ongoing sustained funding to enable them to survive.

Finally, Frandsen et al (2021) found that researchers are "increasingly inspired by narrative approaches when studying libraries, and exploring narratives and stories that can capture a library's value is a promising field within library studies." They suggest that by using narrative approaches, more voices can be captured, bringing a richness to the stories about the library that we uncover, and crucially for this literature review, that "more work is needed to develop theoretical and methodological frameworks with which narratives and stories can capture the library's worth" (Frandsen et al, 2021). This is the gap that this research will attempt to plug.

This concludes the literature review, within which we have looked at key facts and figures from each of the sources in the literature search then laid the groundwork for a closer look into those narratives using thematic content analysis, which follows.

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8. Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic content analysis, specifically 'directed' content analysis, is chosen as a method of qualitative data exploration. Directed content analysis is utilised because the study has an "existing theory about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description," and "the qualitative researcher might choose to use a directed approach to content analysis, as a way to validate or extend this theory conceptually," confirming that "existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes." (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Counting

instances and occurrences of words and phrases (quantitative) informs meaning (qualitative) and alternative and euphemistic phrases, words and sentences are identified and utilised, to extend a theory (directed). NVivo 12 software is utilised for the data analysis.

There are biases inherent in this method of content analysis specifically in the context of this particular study, which must be acknowledged. Accordingly, as Hsieh and Shannon (2005) state: "researchers might be likely to find evidence that is supportive rather than non-supportive of a theory." Because the theory and positioning of this study is already made clear, the findings do follow suit accordingly, with biases exposed and discussed where relevant and appropriate, insofar as that is possible.

This section will now look at the coding rationale used, then move onto the methods employed for visualising and processing the data including how the themes were built from the coding software, analyse initial findings, then dive deeper into the quotes that emerge from the software processes, by finishing with a vignette-style micro-narratives and looking at emergent findings.

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8.1 Rationale & Methods

Coding rationale was borne from the same logic the NVivo query tool uses, but as acknowledged above, was subject to some degree of researcher bias as judgement calls had to be made in hundreds of instances as to where a word, sentence or paragraph belonged in the coding structure. Synonyms, stemmed words, specialisations and generalisations were included. Example: for the code 'loneliness', words, sentences and paragraphs also assigned to that code included: 'lonely', 'alone', and 'no support network.' 'Lives/living alone' was not coded to 'loneliness' as a default, as that would infer that all people who live alone are lonely – though in instances where the context confirmed that living alone did indeed increase loneliness, it was coded as such; 'isolated' had its own code, as did 'social inclusion', but where appropriate and relevant, instances were coded to one or both of these alongside loneliness.

Inferences were coded according to the judgement of the researcher. Example: "…often being the only person they would speak to" (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.30) was coded to 'loneliness', 'isolation', 'local resident or library user' and 'belonging'. It was also coded to 'library staff' due to its context – the 'only person they would speak to' referred to the staff member, underscoring the importance not just of the library building but the staff that run it too – the human, personal element of the public library service. Notably, the decision was made not

to code exact matches in every occurring instance: in many, 'loneliness' was indeed coded to 'Loneliness', but in others it was not relevant – for example if it was in a sentence that repeated the previous section or summarised a page that had already been coded. Lastly, there were some phenomena that featured highly but were not coded due to irrelevance to the scope of the study – one example is children, as the study focuses on adults in the United Kingdom.

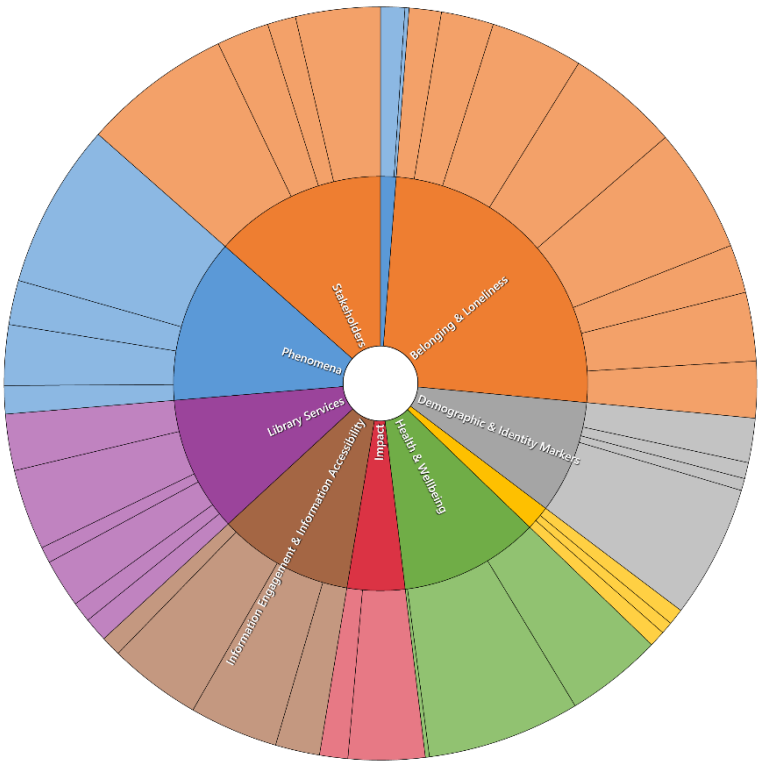
The twelve documents from the literature search and review were coded into fifty NVivo 'nodes' (referred to as codes henceforth), reduced to forty-five after two codes were merged with others, and three further codes that attracted less than five instances each were uncoded and deleted. The latter choice, to uncode rather than merge, was taken as a) these codes bore no real impact on the study overall and were not notably relevant to the scope, and b) all instances of these references were also coded elsewhere, meaning their content and meaning was not lost.

These forty-five original codes were then assigned to and split across ten parent themes, transforming them all into child codes. The full list of original codes (before aggregation with their parents) can be found as Appendix C, with the most common explored in detail below. The ten themes that were devised from the codes follow as Table 4, visualised further as Figure 1 showing parent themes with their unmarked child codes branching off into the outer ring. (Of the smaller inner ring theme sections: blue = Age Groups, yellow = Feelings & Emotions).

Table 4

Theme (in alphabetical order)	**No. of child codes**	**Total no. of references aggregated across all documents & child codes**
Age Groups	2	41
Belonging & Loneliness	8	611
Demographic & Identity Markers	6	136
Feeling & Emotions	3	52
Health & Wellbeing	4	153
Impact	2	113
Information Engagement / Information Accessibility	5	156
Library Services	6	172
Phenomena	5	182
Stakeholders	4	212
= 10 Themes	**= 45 Child Codes**	**= 1,805 References**

Fig. 1



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8.2 Three Initial Findings

Firstly, the 'Belonging & Loneliness' theme parented eight child codes and was by far the highest scoring in terms of aggregated references across all parent themes, gathering 611 total (the next theme down gathering 212). The child codes under this theme were:

belonging // communication and talking // community // connection

isolation // library reduces loneliness // loneliness // social inclusion

From these codes, 'belonging' and 'loneliness' gathered the third and fourth highest number of references across the entire project of 45 codes, at 91 each. With coding rationale considered and coder biases acknowledged, it can be reasonably argued that this suggests the literature search was effective in pulling up documents containing narratives relevant to belonging and loneliness specifically in relation to public libraries.

Secondly, of the ten parent themes, only four occurred in all 12 documents. They were:

- Belonging & Loneliness with eight child codes and 611 aggregated references
- Stakeholders with four child codes and 212 aggregated references
- Phenomena with five child codes and 182 aggregated references
- Library Services with six child codes and 172 aggregated references

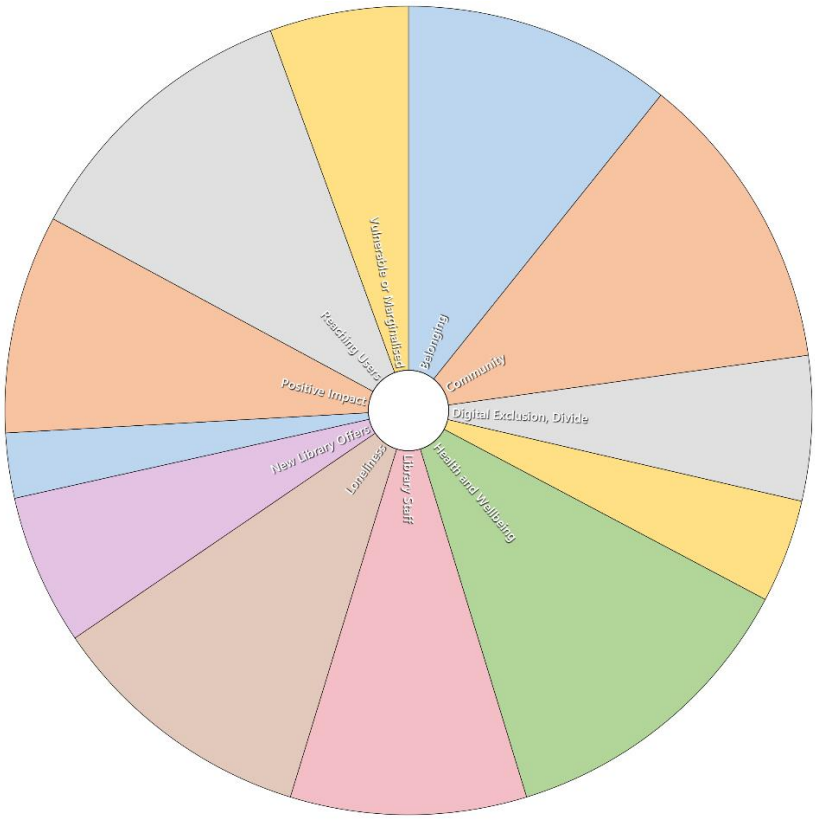
Thirdly, we take a deeper look at the two main narrative themes that this project is concerned with: belonging and loneliness. To ensure that other notable codes and themes are considered and compared with each other, so that we may draw conclusions and find interesting narratives within the content analysis and between concepts, this is done by performing coding queries on the two relevant child codes: 'belonging' and 'loneliness' that compares them with the highest scoring child code from each of the ten parent themes (including their own parent theme, Belonging & Loneliness), to find the number of co-occurrences (where a section of text was coded either to Belonging or Loneliness, and also the other child code it is being compared to). This is laid out in Table 5 below, visualised further in Figure 2. (The smaller unmarked yellow section is 'Happiness, Pride, Confidence'). It is then built on in the section of vignettes that follows.

Table 5

Parent Theme	Highest Scoring Child Code	Co-Occurrences with:
Age Groups >	Older People = 22 references	Belonging = 2 Loneliness = 7
Belonging & Loneliness >	Community = 102 references	Belonging = 36 Loneliness = 29
Demographic & Identity Markers >	Vulnerable or Marginalised = 47 references	Belonging = 12 Loneliness = 15
Feelings & Emotions >	Happiness, Pride, Confidence = 35 references	Belonging = 14 Loneliness = 9
Health & Wellbeing >	Health and Wellbeing = 106 references	Belonging = 26 Loneliness = 32
Impact >	Positive Impact = 74 references	Belonging = 27 Loneliness = 22
Information Engagement & Information Accessibility >	Digital Exclusion, Divide = 49 references	Belonging = 16 Loneliness = 10
Library Services >	New Library Offers = 51 references	Belonging = 7 Loneliness = 6

Phenomena >	Reaching Users = 98 references	Belonging = 35 Loneliness = 28
Stakeholders >	Library Staff = 80 references	Belonging = 12 Loneliness = 11

Figure 2



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8.3 A Vignette-Style Deep Dive into the Narratives

The above initial findings are interesting, but what are the main narrative threads running through the documents attached to these twelve codes – what are the common stories these codes are capturing? A new NVivo query was run at this stage, this time bringing together both main codes of Belonging and Loneliness as an 'All' (not 'Any') search parameter, then adding each of the top ten child codes above (again as 'All'), as individual searches.

We now move into a vignette-style micro-narrative collection of belonging and loneliness related quotes pulled from each of these ten searches, a collection of both user voices and staff voices.

"As one of the UK's most widely used and trusted public services, public libraries have a powerful role to play in addressing some of our most challenging social issues, such as poverty, loneliness and social isolation, and social mobility" (CILIP, 2018, p.20).

"Many services are now investigating how they can tackle the evident problem of digital exclusion among residents who are most in need and isolated, providing equipment and training to help them access the digital offer" (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.19).

"Vulnerable people who are digitally and socially excluded need to develop and improve their skills to access critical services like accessing health services, council services or shopping online to do their groceries" (Libraries Week, 2021a, p.1).

"I feel alone and worthless, but whenever I come to the library the environment makes me feel good here, I can meet other people" ~ Library User (CIPFA, 2020, p.20).

"Together we and our library partners mobilised to reach those most in need of social connectivity, overcoming the challenges of delivery in a pandemic, including the closure of library buildings and the difficulties of distance engagements. The flexibility, commitment and support of library staff and management to deliver this has been amazing" ~ The Reading Agency (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021, p.2).

"…it brings people together in the library. The gasps of awe and wonder are like music, and having such a positive experience brings people back again … we are very proud of this project as we can see how positive an impact it can have ... It dovetails neatly with our strategic aims of supporting digital inclusion and participation, and supporting health and wellbeing" ~ Library Staff Member (Libraries Week, 2021b, p.2).

"Now the library service is re-opening gradually, it is seizing the opportunity to re-configure its offer and give staff the opportunity to work in a new way that supports vulnerable people" ~ Library Staff Member (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.43).

"We wanted to get them into the building; but also needed to understand their recent home life and support needs - what had their life been like during lockdown? We wanted to get people used to each other again" ~ Library Staff Member (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.39).

"Public libraries help people to access employment and job seeking skills; create support networks and local interventions for families, people at risk of isolation and people with chronic health needs ... We offer incredible value for money given all that we deliver" ~ Library Staff Member (Libraries Connected, 2020, p.5).

"Another issue related to [elderly people] … in some degree of social isolation is that they can find it difficult to meet new people. Group members reported that regularly meeting with others in a relaxed, safe environment had helped to grow their social confidence…" (Moore Kingston Smith, 2019, p.22).

"[Libraries] can act as a social space open to anyone, and are one of the only public places where it is possible to spend time with others without spending money. They are visited by many different types of people, and often those who are at risk of social isolation, meaning that libraries are well suited to address issues around loneliness and social isolation" (Moore Kingston Smith, 2019, p.6).

> "This case study also highlighted the importance of emotional attachment and support, for example 'belonging' and 'commitment', from both service providers and service users in the community engagement process" (Sung, Hepworth and Ragsdell, 2013, p.215).

> "Public libraries are places for human interaction, neutral, safe spaces or 'community hubs' where people can meet others and pursue interests with other like-minded local residents, contributing to social cohesion. They also fulfil a role in placemaking…" (Libraries Connected, 2019, p.9).

> "This impact analysis found that reduced isolation and loneliness were key outcomes for all the main stakeholder groups. Related outcomes such as improved mental health, improved social support networks, and increased feelings of belonging were also reported consistently across the groups" (Moore Kingston Smith, 2019, p.33).

These vignettes are a deeper look into Belonging and Loneliness from the documents analysed. Elements of each of these core concepts are visible in each vignette – either directly referenced, or indirectly discussed. For example, intertwined with ideas of belonging are experiences of 'human interaction', 'emotional support', 'social cohesion', 'social support', and 'placemaking'. Likewise, intertwined with ideas of loneliness are experiences such as 'isolated', 'digital exclusion', 'most in need', and 'vulnerable'. These are all expressions and embodied knowledges referenced within the micro-narratives. These expressions can be viewed as social values, or the value of the library, if we view them through a constructivist lens – which is to say that each individuals narrated experience of life possesses inherent value in and of itself, without needing an external justifier or measure. These values, in turn, could (and should) be mobilised to express citizens needs in their local communities – including but not limited to the presence of a public library building.

We also see ideas emerging around safe environments and trust in the institution of the library, in connection with the building itself and what it represents to users – so, not just being welcomed into and belonging to an idea or a group of people, but also a place; a geographical

location that an individual physically moves towards and then inhabits. Perhaps the most powerful vignette overall was the library user who tells us, "I feel alone and worthless, but whenever I come to the library the environment makes me feel good here, I can meet other people." Another powerful statement, as narrated by a library worker from 2011, is: "I have had one gentleman tell me, over the counter, that he would quietly commit suicide if the library closed. Libraries provide a support for many of the most vulnerable in society (the housebound, the lonely) and remember, we are lucky if we are not vulnerable at some point in our lives." (Anstice, 2011). We will further explore the idea of the body navigating to the location of the library, the sense of belonging to a building or a location, and psychogeographical belongings and knowledges, in the autoethnographical section that follows shortly.

To summarise, for the purposes of adhering to the scope and timescale of the study the above method was satisfactory, however it is acknowledged that we only looked at 10 child codes, meaning 35 are not explored in any fuller depth than their relation (and only then if notable) to the main codes of belonging and loneliness. Some of these codes could be very interesting in their own right and reveal other narratives and knowledges – there are potentially thousands of other connections within the 12 documents analysed, across all codes. The digital divide that emerged in these vignettes is one immediately obvious example, though there is a wealth of literature exploring that particular phenomenon and its possible solutions already.

Overall, we have nevertheless had a look at the fascinating narratives around belonging, loneliness and public libraries in the United Kingdom, and found some rich, diverse quotes and feelings on the value of the public library service.

~

8.4 Emergent Findings

One emergent finding of note was that, although there was a code for the coding of 'Information Literacy and Information Behaviour,' a need and use that is usually considered one of the core purposes of a public library service, there were only eight instances of this code being used across just four of the 12 files. This was because in other cases where it could have been used, those particular instances fitted more appropriately into other codes instead, as the information behaviour in question had an underlying need which was evident contextually. This small but noteworthy finding challenges the still widely-held notion that libraries exist solely for the loaning of dusty books – as Bawden and Robinson articulate, "information skills and behaviour are usually pragmatic and problem-based: most of the time, people are trying to solve problems,

to make sense of the world, and to do things, not to find information for its own sake" (2012, p.205).

Another emergent finding was that the code 'Digital Exclusion, Divide' gathered the same number of references across the same documents as the code 'Digital Inclusion, Skills, Offerings,' signalling perhaps that these codes could have been merged as, when examined, they either represented similar narratives or meant the same thing, or, in some instances, the opposite narrative was the one espoused. This suggests that in this particular instance, coding logic was not as robust as it could have been for these two codes. However, it had no negative effect on the study as these codes were not relevant to the scope. Additionally, although these codes featured highly in the code counts and could be considered sub-codes or 'types' of information literacy and information behaviour or information needs, as we have seen, they were not the largest featuring reasons for the users studied in these sources.

One last phenomenon that emerged when examining crossovers and co-occurrences of the keywords used in the content analysis was that, so many of them are inextricably interlinked and cannot easily be divided up into categories, even though that is what we have just attempted to do. What this means to say is that, even in instances where they do not appear together in the same sentence or even same document, it is reasonable to suggest that connection is implicit if we reach into our lived experiences and knowledges to find our commonly held truths. For example (denoting the codes in singular quote marks), increased positive mental 'health and wellbeing' outcomes were quoted and measurably proven within the resources analysed, and result from library-run initiatives that foster 'connection' in the 'community' by 'reaching users', perhaps especially 'vulnerable and marginalised' ones, and in many cases increase their 'digital skills and inclusion,' which then increases their ability to 'access online civic services' and apply for jobs, thereby enabling their participation in 'economy and employment' which can then potentially foster 'happiness, pride and confidence,' and bring the reader back once more, full circle, to the concept of 'health and wellbeing'. In multiple places within the 12 documents analysed, these concepts, words and ideas are not necessarily connected in the same paragraphs or contexts. This does not mean, however, that they are not connected at all.

Therefore, when used in conjunction with other methods and lenses like narrative inquiry and autoethnography, connections can be made which are not possible with pure statistical and quantitative data analysis, and meaning may be drawn from these connections. Accordingly, the

above thematic analysis now informs the autoethnographical element and theoretical basis of the study.

~

9. Autoethnography & Narrative Inquiry

The study now switches to first person, in response to Fine's (1998) position that, in these forms of academic writing, "the first-person voice is essential in allowing movement to the left of the "self-other hyphen". This is important for ownership of narrative.

In this section I will walk through the rationale for the choices made around methods and theories, followed by introducing an autobiographical autoethnography to add to the vignette micro-narratives, look at the idea of stories and values through the lens of power and protest, blend and inspect these articulations using narrative inquiry to look for new, collective knowledges, and look at other theoretical positionings that I believe help enhance overall understandings of public library value narratives.

~

9.1 Theoretical Choices, Rationale, and Methods

As Ellis and Bochner (2006) suggest, there are broadly two types of autoethnography – evocative (foregrounding the writer's personal stories) and analytical (connecting to some broader set of social phenomena), both of which are relevant to this study. Their definition of autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.739)." Much care is taken within this section of the study to steer clear of "the communicative dead end of solipsism" or straying into "confessional tales" (Butz and Besio, 2009). Instead, a conscious and deliberate choice is made to both understand and represent a phenomenon that exceeds the self, and scrutinise, publicise, and rework my own self-understanding in relation to the subject of the study and within the context of public libraries by connecting my own lived experiences back to what I found previously in the literature review and content analysis.

This section is an attempt to find out why my own experiences, when I accept my position as 'the researched,' are interesting for this study; why they are interesting for LIS researchers; and how they feed back into the narratives and stories I looked at earlier on while positioned as 'the researcher'. Fourie (2021, p.4) asserts that "self-focussed critical reflection and self-evaluation

are at the centre of autoethnographic research. The writer is both the researcher and the research participant. Personal thoughts and actions need to be visible, and the writing should be open to investigation by others." Hughes and Pennington (2017, p.687) agree: "Autoethnography is [where] the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher as similar to the self." Adding to this idea, Fourie (2021) articulates that autoethnography is undertaken "with a purpose – to reveal social and cultural challenges, injustice and imbalances that need to be addressed" (p.3). We will return more to the idea of social injustice and imbalances further on, in the theoretical section and conclusion, and in relation to the closure of UK public libraries.

Additionally, autoethnography is an interesting tool in the field of LIS specifically because as evidenced by the publication this year of the first LIS-focused collected resource on this method (Fourie, 2021), it is an under-used one yet provides a richness that less commonly found through the more traditional 'researched >> researcher' dichotomies. Indeed, a 'bibliography of autoethnography in library and information science' within this resource lists only 42 items (Fourie, 2021, pp.204-207). Therefore, autoethnographical and autobiographical narrative inquiry methods can only add to and enhance the already richly diverse body of the commonly used methodologies presently existing within LIS, balancing out scales that currently tip in favour of quantitative methods, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Narrative inquiry is drawn on to inform the theoretical basis for the study. As Bruce et al (2016) suggest, "the narrative turn is a term used primarily in literary studies, social, and human sciences and expresses a shift toward legitimising peoples' stories as important sources of empirical knowledge." This study seeks to know endless truths about the ways in which users value libraries as they relate to loneliness and belonging, rather than attempting to find one narrative or truth that can represent the study; library users are diverse, not homogenous.

Why do I want to situate myself as both the researched and the researcher? I align myself with Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2013) at this point by agreeing that "narrative researchers are crucially a part of the data we collect; our presence, our very bodies, are imprinted upon all that we do. It is left to us then to determine how we account for ourselves in the work that we do, to consider the impact of our own positioning and that of others – that is, those whose lives lie at the centre of our research – on our scholarship." (p.18) I am looking for a mechanism to join my own autobiographical autoethnography with the stories of those in the content analysis and find out how those situated knowledges are connected to my own. Here, I also align myself with Grace and Sen (2013), who assert that while acknowledging the "graphy" and "auto," they

are mostly concerned with "ethnos" – thus, narrative inquiry should provide me with "a method of opening up the data and understanding the culture with which I interact on a daily basis." Unlike Grace and Sen (2013) however, who differentiate between autobiography and autoethnography, I argue that autoethnography can involve autobiographical representations though is not limited to them, and if labelled and owned as such, this method can be an effective and interesting one for unearthing shared knowledges. Ellis and Bochner (2000) are proponents of this, calling autoethnography "an autobiographical genre of writing and research" (p. 739).

We return to the question of why is this interesting for LIS research specifically. What relation does the use of narrative inquiry bear to the discipline this study is borne from? Firstly, similar to the claim we see earlier that autoethnography is not yet common within LIS, Ford (2020) agrees with this by demonstrating that although this is a phenomenological lens through which to view and theorise on human experience, "researchers in LIS – a human focused profession – have infrequently used it." She also counters that the majority of LIS research is based in quantitative knowledge, and while in some areas of the discipline, empirical research is more straightforward and relevant, these methods can often be in direct conflict with the very human nature of the profession (p.236). Narrative inquiry is focused on human stories, and human narratives of the library are the focus of this study. Lastly, in *What is Narrative Research?,* Squire et al (2014, p.56) state that "the need to narrate difficult and unfamiliar experience is part of the very human need to be understood by others, to be in communication even from the margins. Therefore, attention to human suffering means attention to stories." Crucially, we have found the narratives in the content analysis vignettes overwhelmingly leaning towards the articulations or needs of vulnerable and marginalised users, a theme also present in the autoethnography. Therefore, a focus on what is being communicated from margins seems worth exploring, and provides an opportunity for me to "embrace [my] vulnerability with a purpose" (Fourie, 2021, p.7).

I cannot tell my story of why libraries are necessary – specifically in relation to marginalised and vulnerable groups – or to put it another way, groups more likely to experience higher levels of loneliness and feelings of unbelonging – without exposing my biases. I have been a marginalised and vulnerable individual at many and varied points during my life, and libraries have saved me countless times. For this particular study, to present a sheaf of data without an accompanying 'story' or narrative – to obscure the meaning and intent behind it – would feel like a half-truth, an omission. I believe that in framing this research in terms of narrative I am able to see different layers of meaning and understand more about the values of many and varied individuals in, and on, the public library. This hopefully brings the research in line with my claim made earlier, which

is that there is no objective singular truth on the value of the public library precisely because library users are not a homogenous group, and truth and meaning are not statistically measurable anyhow, being different for each individual when argued through a constructivist lens. This means, in turn, that we need new ways of articulating and counting value in the conversation around the public library.

So, while autoethnography allows me to articulate my stories and knowledges, narrative inquiry is what allows me to analyse them, both on their own and in connection with the narratives of others.

Therefore, I lay out my own experience as a lifelong user of public libraries and my emotional connection to them, from the lived experience of having been embedded in the research setting for almost four decades and as an individual from, what mainstream research narratives would label, a marginalised and disadvantaged background. In doing so, I align myself consciously and deliberately with the narratives from the content analysis, acknowledging that I am a library user *before* I am a researcher, and claiming that this is why autoethnography is therefore the best fit for this study. There are innumerable accounts, both in the literature and anecdotally, of when disparate power dynamics have been leveraged in ethnographical studies by the use of top-down academic authority over the subject or population that is being studied 'from above,' facilitated by the researcher absenting the 'self' from the research. This dynamic is characteristic of many systems I have experienced – the foster care system, the benefits system, the mental health system, the chronic illness healthcare system – systems that I escaped to the public library from – and also in a number of workplaces I have experienced. These are structures that function in 'top down', hierarchical manners: examples of 'power over' rather than 'power with'. Coming from the background that I do, I cannot easily choose to emulate the same systems of power in my research as the ones that have oppressed me. Consequently, it does not feel possible to talk about the importance of replacing power-over structures with power-with versions unless I am prepared to embody these methods in my own work first.

This study is an attempt to facilitate 'power with,' manifesting as 1) the teller sharing power with the reader as an act of knowledge co-creation, and 2) the researcher sharing power with the researched, *as* the researched, as an act of solidarity, relatability, and vulnerability. "Narrative voice is co-constructed and co-performed", as it depends not just on tellers but audiences too – and so in this way, both my own autoethnographical narratives and those belonging to the individuals within the documents analysed previously are "not altogether

singular and simply possessed and given; they are negotiated, performed and dialogical" (Squire et al, 2014, p.76).

Lastly, another reason for the choice to use autoethnography was to seek, in however much of a small way, to turn the 'power over' dynamic on its head by deliberately acknowledging my biases, subjectivity and vulnerability, and employing them instead as an epistemological resource. I offer them up for inspection and critique, rather than attempting to eliminate them or denying they exist at all, even if only by omission. As Butz and Besio (2009) phrase it, the objective here is to "destabilise ethnographic authority by writing in a way that emphasises the socially and politically constituted nature of knowledge claims." Or, attempting to create new knowledges in the pursuit of the defence of the public library.

~

9.2 Stories, Power & Protest

As per the summary of the Frandsen et al (2021) systematic review, to really understand what a community needs, especially in relation to its public library system, we should move into listening to and elevating "living stories." These narratives may be more common that we think – structured stories, while often satisfying in a literary sense and easier to analyse objectively, will often not represent the non-linear structures and thought processes that the everyday person experiences and embodies. Sense-making is just one method by which humans assimilate and develop coping strategies, and we sense-make through story-making and storytelling. The availability and accessibility of information as it relates to the self can facilitate these story-making, sense-making journeys – especially for marginalised, vulnerable, or disadvantaged groups, who may not have easy access to information at home and therefore use public libraries as a recognisable and navigable community anchor from which to partake in civic participation. I did not have access to information at home as a child, but I found it when I visited the library. As an adult, there were multiple periods of time in which I had no smartphone, no WiFi/data, or both, and the increasing move towards e-governance within urban settings in the UK meant I could not access civic services, welfare benefits or health referrals without London's public libraries.

> *"I was safe among the stacks, and I didn't often feel safe growing up. … My library card was a passport to countless other worlds and an escape from this one" (Barr, 2021).*

“There are no relations of power without resistance” (Foucault, 1980). It is my experience, and that of many others well-documented throughout history, that when the person or system wielding power is aware that an individual or group within that system has no access to information on their rights, it will often wield that power against them, knowing they do not have the resources to be able to resist it effectively. This is often at play when, in struggles for justice (to use a relevant example, a campaign against the closure of the public library building), an onlooker is easily able to see that the oppressed is the ‘truthful’ and ‘righteous’ party but finds it more difficult to see why the oppressor is still wielding the power, despite the identification of an obvious imbalance within the power dynamic or discourse at play.

However, knowledge is power, so this is where free access to information comes in – which we achieve in part through public libraries. It is also where we become aware of the importance of knowing which power systems are in control or at play in any given situation. Radford (1992, p.148) summarises Foucaldian thought on this as follows: “For Foucault, objectivity and truth are sites of struggle among competing systems of discourse. What is scientific at any particular historical juncture is determined by which system is dominant and not which system is true.” To add to this notion of objectivity that this statement touches on, Squire et al (2014, p.54-55) claim that when we are theorising on power and narratives we must also accept that narratives are mobile, shifting across time and situation, and they implicate the researcher along with the researched including any potential biases and subjectivity, which in turn gives narrative work “a very particular relation to issues of power and resistance.” I think there are two ways to view this. One way is, if we understand the landscape we are on and work to deliberately shift the spaces and structures in which we have these conversations, changing the rules and individuals we use to moderate them, then we could mobilise marginal narratives in pursuit of a larger, collective goal – one that comprehends and re-presents new and refocused ideas of what constitutes value when discussing the future of the public library. The other way is, our narratives are undermined by the system in power precisely because they cannot be measured statistically or numerically and therefore, they will continue to be discounted when the file for the closure of the public library hits the policy makers desk. Of course, if we work diligently and methodically towards the first, then the second becomes moot.

Without the ability to engage with information sources, it is incredibly difficult for us to situate ourselves accurately within both our civic and social environments, and those of the systems we are consciously or unconsciously inextricably intertwined with. When we cannot do this, we

cannot resist where necessary, and when this happens, disempowerment occurs. It is my lived experience that this state of being leads to loneliness and feelings of unbelonging.

> *"We used to think that power was about either the creation or the control of things, that it was about the means of production of goods. That's what Marx thought. It was not about the production of experiences or services. Then society switched to a focus on power being expressed through the control of information. Once control of information is recognised as a source of power, then any powerful entity wants to control this information. Governments and empires all want to control information. What we're seeing today is the very beginning of another switch, from power over things, to power over information, to power about the questions that shape the answers that give the information about things. If you take the view that semantic information is broadly speaking delivered as a question plus an answer, then those who control the questions shape the answers. That's the new power we need to understand and manage properly today" (Floridi, 2021).*

There are countless narratives against library closures that are emotive, experience-based, lived testimonies, which are often met with analytical arguments based in statistics: user and membership numbers, footfall, etc. Statistics cannot ever possibly tell the *story* of the library. Even the snapshots that follow are stories – deliberately curated stories of my personal experiences in an attempt to translate direct, lived experience into a coherent narrative. It is a slippery thing, very often quite difficult, as the moment we put pen to paper the 'right' words tend to disappear. So, we curate our stories based, in part, on how others have written stories like ours before; pre-existing accounts of similar experiences that feel accurate, truthful, and beyond any articulable experience when we read them. Why does this form of evidence not tend to count when using judgement to determine which narratives will steer and decide the future of any given situation, institution, or social phenomena?

Van der Kolk (2015) asserts, in his book about how the body stores trauma, that "most research is me-search." Many people research things purely because they are interesting – much of the history of academia exists to prove this – but so many of us also research in order to sense-make, to find a placeholder for ourselves, to locate our stories in the stacks and in the literature, to figure out where exactly we belong, and who we are similar to. Lived experience is a truth, of which there are many, and more thought could be given to personal narratives as a noteworthy way of demonstrating value – especially when there is a contingent of voices all claiming the same thing. Much activism is a good example of this, as if it were not true then no protest would

ever be successful. History is littered with innumerable examples of campaigns and protests won by the use of emotions and feelings, lived experiences and collective voices – by people telling their stories, and other people hearing them. We must move away from needing statistical proof as a way of assessing the value of something – this is a neoliberal concept and one that can seem now almost irreversibly entrenched in how we interact with each other socially, politically, and emotionally.

As Corble (2019) claims when discussing the social activists that contribute countless hours to Save The Library campaigns, "in excising and devaluing the people that make the library work, i.e. the professionals that activate and facilitate resources for its vulnerable users, and the campaigners that fight to keep this possible, the result is an even greater deficit of social value."

> *"Libraries are where minds flourish and grow. They are like a kind of water supply. Without libraries a country can become a kind of desert." ~ Stephen Fry (cited in Cowdrey, 2016)*

~

9.3 The Autobiographical Autoethnography

When I was young, I could breathe in the library. If I was reading a library book, I was calm… still… life would move around me, but I would remain rooted to the chair or corner I had wedged myself into. I devoured the public library shelves, reading hundreds of volumes, hundreds of times each.

I can remember back to when my eyes were level with the second shelf up. I'd peer through to the calves and shins of people in the next aisle, would sit at the hallowed BBC Micro computer (it was the eighties and nineties), and bury my face in all the books, all the time, to breathe in their smell. I knew there were other worlds in those spines, and I wanted to assault as many of my senses as possible with these universes.

I sought refuge and safety in them, I looked for help in their stacks, anything that showed me myself. As I dropped in and out of foster care, I found the closest library to each new house; they were somewhere I could catch my balance. I knew nobody would ask questions I had no answer for or prod me inquisitively. Librarians left me alone and looked out for me at the same time, giving me space. Later, it was in a library that I decided to rent my first room in a shared house. I was 14, I lied about my age to secure it, and I ran away and left school so I could work to pay the

rent. I couldn't have made that decision in a caff, a supermarket, a park. I certainly couldn't make it at home. It had to be a library; they were the only places I could think straight.

When I was young, libraries saved my life; saved my mind from folding in on itself.

~

As a young adult, I retreated to libraries during the difficult times only, for a number of years, till the worst of the storm was weathered by their roofs. Now I go to them for pleasure.

Many times, I needed to access housing forms, health forms, and benefits forms. Sometimes I did not even have enough money for a biro pen. At one point I lived in a crisis house and then a hostel, both with no Wi-Fi, and I used the library to download music and surf social media, needing to feel the online-life companionship of the red notification icon in the top right corner while I simultaneously experienced the real-life companionship of the unassuming, friendly librarians moving about busily and peacefully. At one point my mental health was so poor that it became physical, and I would helplessly shake from head to toe, absolutely unable to control my body and experiencing a profound sense of shame that I don't think I'll ever top. I sat in bucket chairs and got my phone out to kill the time, placing it carefully on the arm rest to avoid holding it in my unstable hands. Then I'd pace the aisles, up and down, up and down. It was never-ending, never-ending, felt as if it would last forever. But I was simultaneously comforted by the physicality and the presence of the building, and how it held me within it.

When I needed to study, I went to the library. When I wanted to watch a film, I'd borrow a DVD. Between jobs and with time to kill, I'd go to the library. When I applied for new jobs, it was from the library. When I was diagnosed with PTSD and chronic illness, I went and sat in the library to process it, then got onto a computer to research my new medical labels.

When the phone call came for me to activate my dad's Do Not Resuscitate order, I had just got out of the shower. The nurse's voice was gentle, then everything just stopped. I came to a short while later, dressed and in the library, feeling the coolness of the ceiling fan on my wet head. My legs had just walked me there unbidden. On the way back, I sat in the centre of a circle of sawn-off tree trunks and prayed.

One time, I burst into tears at the front desk, and was made a cup of tea with three sugars. I don't remember what I was crying about, but I do remember the sugars. I also remember that I perked right up – not from the sugar, but from the kindness. Librarians are unacknowledged social workers.

When I had psychosis, it would stop at the library. I counted the spines of books from worn sofas, watched the photocopier tick over, humming into action, watched the people come and

go, for their papers, their books, their internet access, their courses, their groups. When my mind ground to a halt I waited, in libraries, for it to start working again. Libraries are where minds can hang suspended, resting. I would not have survived without them.

All these small stories, small happenings and events, are part of a larger narrative. It is one of survival. They were also physical responses, bodily responses. The way I experience loneliness is physical, as well as mental and emotional. My body responds by closing my throat, making it difficult to swallow, and I curl in on myself like a woodlouse or a hedgehog. I will forever have a chronically painful back from those years. So the response to not feeling as if I belonged anywhere, the response to the loneliness that came from that feeling, are physical ones, bodily ones, to a state of being that by its very nature and because of the effect that it has, reinforces itself. Having somewhere to put the body is crucial to overcoming this and breaking the cycle. Having somewhere to navigate towards. A purpose.

I was always welcome. Even when I was not capable of forming thoughts or stringing sentences together, I still knew, without having to consider it consciously, that I belonged in the library.

> *"…public libraries have a long tradition of providing caring, welcoming and inclusive spaces for people with mental health needs…" (Libraries Deliver, 2018).*

~

9.3.1 Psychogeography & The Belonging of the Body

Belonging also carries connotations of geography within my own situated knowledges – it is not just a concept applicable to feelings of being welcomed somewhere ideologically, but physically, too. It is about where our bodies belong, and where we put them. Safety, the idea of institutional trust in a public building that we generally believe will not erase, brutalise or further marginalise our bodies but care for them, instead.

I have experienced a physicality at play in libraries, in the diversity of all the different types of bodies that use them and the equality of those bodies when they are under the library roof. How we hold our bodies, the ways in which we walk into a space or navigate it… I feel like they carry less power, less hierarchy, in libraries. My body was, and still is, the central focus of many of the negative experiences I had which led me to seek refuge in the library – to ignore this, or to hide it in shame, is to reinforce the collectively permitted erasure of the marginalised body that leads to the negative experiences in the first place. I do not permit myself to engage in this erasure. As

Squire et al (2014, p.81) articulate, physical realities shape narrative too, not just verbal narrative structures, semantics and context. The body "cannot be narrated away," and my body asserts itself here in this study, it is central to my situated knowledges and therefore, my narrative.

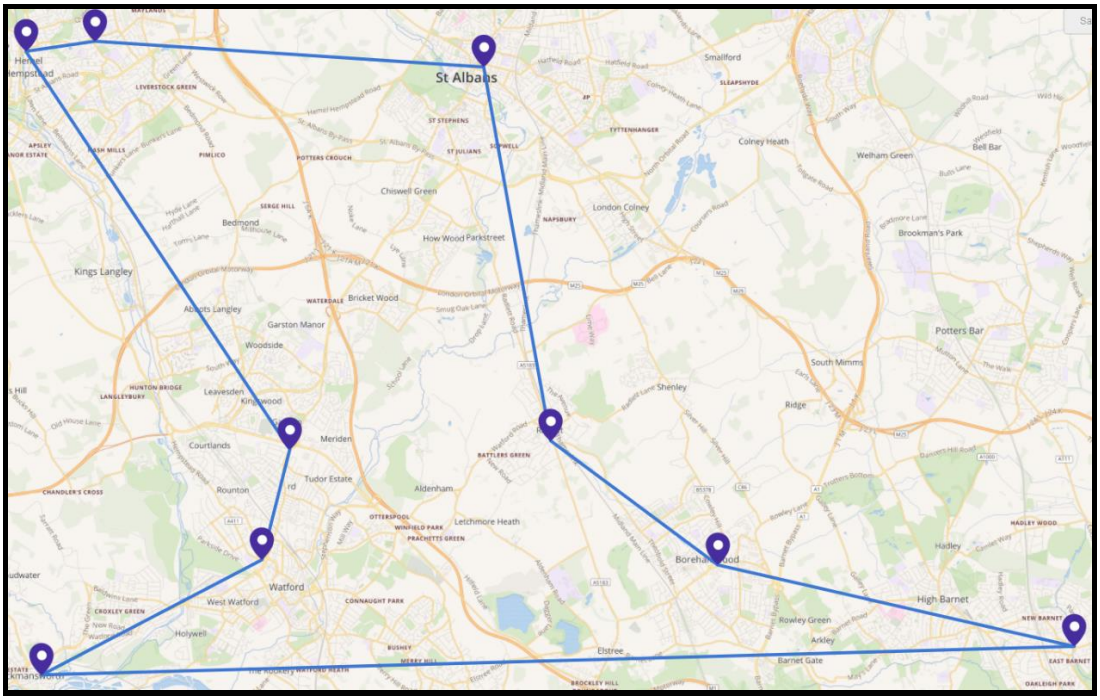
At the same time, embodiment is shaped by narrative, so it is a cyclical thing, all parts feeding into and reinforcing each other. The stories I tell become my bodily reality, and the places I situate my body become my narrative. The library is where I situate my body, deliberately, as an act of resistance but also one of self-protection. I am safe there.

I like to flâneur. I particularly like the way the word itself rolls off the tongue and feels to say. My body likes to flâneur, my mind likes it. According to Debord (1955), psychogeography is "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals," so the movement between libraries across a city or country, the act of knowing literally where I am geographically in order to have a sense of where my body belongs, and how to move it to that place of belonging, is key to my survival. Getting to the library and back helps me organise my emotions, I create and traverse old and new desire lines to reach them.

~

Here is a map of the libraries from my childhood; these were some of my desire lines:

https://maphub.net/samdodd/childhood-libraries-dissertation

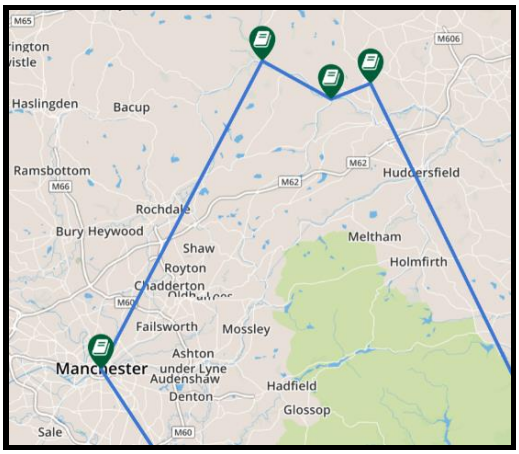


Here is one of each library I recovered from, came back to life from, wrote this study from. A full list is also included further on as Appendix A:

https://maphub.net/samdodd/public-libraries-dissertation

The South

The North



An agoraphobic for several years, I often couldn't leave the house for weeks at a time. But when I did, the library was my anchor point. I'd bounce from my flat to the library and back again like a neurotic yo-yo, string at snapping point to begin with, gradually becoming slacker and slacker as the visits increased. I frequented two local libraries during that time, one of which required me to cross a park to reach it – another joy, another break from the noise of the traffic-filled streets, another chance for me to place-make and sense-make, to criss-cross the grass deliberately avoiding the concrete instructions of direction, ever-rebelliously creating new desire lines, counter-mapping as an act of resistance to my own sheer terror, redefining the pathways to feel more in control, the impact of each step in my thighs a reminder of the finiteness of my body. My confidence grew with routine mapped walks to the library, by understanding exactly where I was at every single moment, then playing with it. The location of libraries determines our engagement with them, how we get to them, *whether* we get to them.

To proofread this study, I would print it and go flâneuring with a voice recorder, annotating the margins vocally as I stretched across my desire lines in the parks, estates, and backstreets of London's East End. I no longer need a map; my body, with all its loneliness narratives and desire to belong, led me to the library always. Sometimes I'd wait till I was there, editing in silence with ink. The library was always my point of arrival and departure, and I always felt like I needed to connect with the physical page via the physical building.

This is a love letter to public libraries.

The great untold truth of libraries is that people need them not because they're about study and solitude, but because they're about connection." ~ Bella Bathurst (cited in The Story They Tell, 2021)

~

10. Summary, Findings & Theory

We will look at the connections between the narratives explored in the study now. Firstly, though, to acknowledge that as Squire et al (2014, p.76) warn in relation to using narrative inquiry as a theoretical lens, "giving emphasis to the narrative voice of the researched, and in particular that of the hidden and marginal, can reinscribe social exclusion as to … collect, interpret and edit what [these groups] say about their lives *as socially excluded people* may have the effect of deepening their lack of power. However, the "bringing together of such stories can also enable collective action." It seems important to note that at this stage because, as has become clear across the study and as seen in the previous section, in the process of looking for narratives of loneliness and belonging, interrelated connections have been unearthed in relation to vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups specifically. The majority of the narratives uncovered in the methods used are linked to concepts of belonging and loneliness but also stem from, or about, these groups specifically.

So, moving these voices – of which I consider myself one – from the excluded margins to the centre is one desired function of this study: rather than reinscribing powerlessness, by joining the voices across multiple resources with my own instead and offering up my position as an equal in this co-creation as both researcher and researched, the voices clamouring together for the survival of the public library may be amplified, facilitating positive action and results, or at the very least, a new conversational method to add those already used in library activism and campaigning.

To summarise the concept of the body belonging in the physical public library space and embodied knowledges or ways of knowing, as just one lens through which to view the statements this study makes; Castelli (2018) tells us that "bodies are political and an embodied approach to public space is fundamental in order to re-think contemporary democracies" suggesting that the embodied approach can "provide essential tools to undo the modern idea of an absolute individual subject that lies at the heart of the neoliberal vision, pinpointing

dependency, relationship, and vulnerability as defining attributes of being human." This is echoed by Barclay (2017) "…there are many compelling stories that library supporters could, and should, tell about the value of public library space, about the good things that happen in libraries only because library space is there as a tangible physical presence. Library space makes it possible for people to learn, socialize, escape, and connect in ways that no other present-day space—private, governmental, or commercial—can."

In the narratives within the literature review and content analysis, we see multiple statements of belonging, summarised here: "the needs of people who have no internet enabled devices or ability to communicate online … [highlight] the continued need for the public library building as an open-to-all physical place of access and inclusion;" "the presence of the physical library building improves a person's sense of belonging to their local community … for all groups, but especially socially excluded, marginalised, and disadvantaged ones;" the building itself "creates stronger, more resilient communities, lessening loneliness and increasing feelings of belonging as a result;" "people across all demographic groups reported feeling less lonely and more connected as a direct result of their public libraries and the in-person services and events they offer;" "the presence of a public library building with trained staff lessens loneliness in their communities and fosters feelings of belonging;" and "the public library building, and the activities and interventions run within, alleviate loneliness explicitly." Some vignettes of note were: "I feel alone and worthless, but whenever I come to the library the environment makes me feel good here, I can meet other people" and ""[Libraries] can act as a social space open to anyone, and are one of the only public places where it is possible to spend time with others without spending money … libraries are well suited to address issues around loneliness and social isolation." To bring this together with my own autobiographical autoethnography, I build further on this idea of belonging, saying that the act of 'belonging' in the library "is not just a concept applicable to feelings of being welcomed somewhere ideologically, but physically, too. It is about where our bodies belong, and where we put them," being able to breathe, and even, survival.

To build on this: the narrative of bodies, specifically in relation to belonging and the processes they undergo when within the spaces of a physical library building, appears as an emergent finding. This is unexpected, but interesting and welcome. Especially in my autobiographical autoethnography, I did not start out intending to narrate my body – this emerged when writing the physical reactions I had to stressors, such as shock, diagnoses and mental health symptoms that had physically manifested, and how I retreated to libraries to survive, which led to considering the act of navigating towards the library and the importance of mapping and

recognising a 'pathway of survival' to and from the physical building itself. It arose again while thinking about and responding to the connected ideas emerging from the content analysis vignettes, which were very similar, for example in the use of the library as a way for these individuals to survive – whether that was for mental health, service referrals, civic access and inclusion, or somewhere to spend time without spending money – and the ways that people feel when they are in the building itself: see the previous quote from the user who felt alone and worthless till they were under the library roof.

Consequently, one positioning of this study is now that, when we accept that our bodies dictate our needs as well as our minds, we can move away from the seemingly incessant drive to count things in order to measure and prove value, and instead move into deeper ways of knowing, and deeper ways of understanding each other and meeting each other's needs. The public library building is characteristic of shared space, shared ways of being, and shared knowledges.

Are the pieces of information within the vignettes and autobiographical autoethnography new knowledges? Not when viewed in isolation and as separate from each other – we see these narratives repeatedly in studies and think-pieces about the value of the public library, including those looked at within the content analysis of this project – so as individual units of information they exist, of course. But it is in bringing these vignettes together as a multi-layered narrative of non-homogeneity, one where all voices are counted individually but collectively make up a new type of knowledge, which creates and suggests a new type of narrative. "These knowledges may be particular, but they can enter into dialogue with each other and produce … larger and more general, though still situated, narrative knowledges" (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013, p.7). They are dialogical knowledges, they invite the reader to consider the presence or absence of the public library with their body, not just with their mind, through the mechanism of intense scrutiny of the body within library environments, as explored within the autoethnography and content analysis.

I believe that the narratives in this study, both in isolation from each other and collectively, are saying the same thing: "we need the library; our communities need it too. Our connections are facilitated by the public library." These new knowledges that we find here, this new narrative, *is one of survival.* When the public library dies, the individual does too; the community around them withers also.

If we accept that one of the opposites of connection is isolation, and we agree that isolation leads to loneliness, we can therefore assert a connection between feeling as if we do not belong somewhere, and its opposite – loneliness.

To revisit the concept of neoliberalism that I touched on earlier in the study: Usherwood and Linley (1999) attest that neoliberal measurement tools are "an enduring problem in demonstrating the value of libraries. The qualitative experiences and impacts of the many services public libraries provide through social and professional infrastructures, are notoriously difficult to measure in numbers alone, which means they are at risk of being subtracted from that which *counts* (in both senses of the word) in the economic models and neoliberal logics and metrics that govern public services." Davison and Harris (2015, p.9) define neoliberalism as a "'revolution' in dominant forms of political and economic governance that in the UK began in the 1970s as a successful drive to roll back the gains of the post-war welfare state, reverse the gains of liberation movements and restore the dominance of business interests across the world." I argue in response to this and in relation to libraries specifically, that neoliberalism cannot ever possibly meet its own systems of measurement, because although we have seen that libraries demonstrably and measurably produce economic value precisely by *not* behaving like a market, neoliberal logic is unable to recognise this, insisting against all evidence that the library would function more efficiently if it did behave like one.

> *"In countries which are invested in this idea [the universal right to an education], you tend to see libraries thriving. In countries which aren't, countries which regard their individual citizens as economic units rather than people with a right to dignity and learning, you tend to see public libraries withering" (Poole, 2021).*

Lastly, to briefly look at this through a constructionist lens in an effort to help enhance the understandings this study has uncovered about public library value narratives: if narratives are a means for social construction, which is the positioning that constructionism takes, then "people's stories of their lived experiences meditate reality and the research enterprise … which can be important in applied research that seeks to make arguments concerning the social needs of particular groups" (Squire et al, 2014) – and following on from that, if narrative constitutes lived experience, and the needs of particular groups is what focuses decisions on funding streams at policymaker and local authority level, then using this lens, are those who wield the power not failing to factor these narratives into the conversation on the future of the public library? If so, this may be because we are having the conversations on uneven playing field.

We need stories, not statistics; narratives, not numbers.

> *Narrative is a sign of civic life. Societies that turn their backs on this right are societies of deafening silence: authoritarian nations, police states, xenophobic cultures. When you fail to protect the right to narrate you risk filling the silence with sirens, megaphones, hectoring voices carried by loudspeakers or from towering podiums. To allow such walls of silence to be built in our midsts and our minds is to live in their shadows long after they have been torn down." (Bhabha, 2021).*

~

11. Conclusion

In the introduction to this study, I claim that the physical building matters, debunk the economic angle of the argument against the continued public funding of them in order to illustrate that current value measures are not reliable methods for supporting this claim, then lay out a methodology for unearthing how we find and analyse narratives about the value of the public library specifically in relation to loneliness and belonging, in order to create new knowledges. The epistemological claim of the study was that crude economic measurements of value are not sufficient knowledge to articulate and understand what libraries are and what their value is; and an objective was to create a new kind of knowledge, one that helps to plug the gap in the current literature around the value of public libraries. The framework for answering these concerns was the research question, "what can a study of the narratives around public libraries in the UK reveal about the ways in which they are valued, and how can we use the tools of autoethnography and narrative inquiry to uncover themes of belonging and loneliness in these value narratives?"

We have now explored various narratives that, it can be argued, support the claim that the physical library building matters, by looking at themes of loneliness and belonging through the use of autoethnography and narrative inquiry. An emergent theme was found to add to those of belonging and loneliness – one concerning where bodies belong, and how ideas around these belongings are connected to the experience of loneliness that an individual has but also to the statements this study has unearthed and reinforces here around the relevance and the ongoing need for the physical public library building. We have seen an overwhelming agreement across the literature analysed that public libraries in the United Kingdom reduce loneliness and

increase feelings of belonging, and that the presence of the building itself, with trained staff inside, is necessary for the continued survival of both individuals and their communities at large. Through looking at the vignettes that emerged from the content analysis we saw themes of belonging and loneliness in each one – expressions and embodied knowledges that can be viewed in terms of social values, or in reference to the inherent value of the library. We have thought through ideas of power and protest in stories, and how together they can mobilise marginal narratives in pursuit of a larger, collective goal – supporting the claim made in relation to the use of autoethnography and narrative inquiry as methods that, by blending narratives and then elevating them by changing the landscape on which we have these conversations, we may not just find or create new types of co-created and collective knowledges for the area of LIS, but also for communities, by creating newer ways to measure the value of libraries and, by extension, asking for a different, gentler kind of civic co-existence.

Finally, a new co-created narrative has emerged. It is one of survival, both of the vulnerable or marginalised individual, and of the communities they – *we* – live within. We see several quotes directly attributing the survival of the narrator to the presence of the physical library building.

11.1 Limitations

If this study were to be conducted again, several things would change or be improved upon. First and foremost, much more time would be taken to build a thematic framework prior to creating nodes and coding within analysis software. Starting from ground zero with less time than ideal meant having to make some fast decisions about the words or phrases I would code, and the ones I would not. I believe this led to the exclusion of some useful and interesting data in the interests of deliverability.

I would also go much deeper into the thematic analysis, coding much more, and producing more graphs and tables – as acknowledged in the vignettes section, the study only looked at 10 of the child codes, leaving another 35 with potentially thousands of other connections that could be explored. For example, it is very possible that there are some interesting links across different types of information – stakeholders included library staff, local delivery partners, NHS and the local authority – what would co-occurrences across these codes bring up?

Lastly, as acknowledged in the Literature Search section, I would expand the search parameters by using more keywords and synonyms, and taking more time to skim-read and screen hundreds more journals, databases, bibliographies, co-citations, and reference lists. It seemed conceivable that there would be more resources available to add to the twelve already analysed,

including much more grey literature, which may provide a richer picture of the narratives around belonging and loneliness in public libraries in the United Kingdom.

Ethical questions are explored in the Reflection that follows as they were not limitations as such, but did require consideration and respect, and did facilitate boundaries or, limits, for what could and could not be said.

11.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The methodological and theoretical instruments of autoethnography and narrative research in this study could act as just two tools in an arsenal of many, for resisting the advancement of neoliberal measurement metrics on public libraries; they could also be used in other studies or frameworks within the discipline of LIS. As revealed in the literature review, the Frandsen et al (2021) study asserted that storytelling should be a "key component of impact assessment more broadly at heritage institutions," and that using storytelling to understand and articulate impact is key to understanding the intangible value of these services. They discovered that narrative approaches are rarely used in evaluations of the public library system, yet "introducing narratives would enable us to move from measurement to meaning." If we are to move away from statistics and into stories as a way of knowing what value libraries have to use societally and culturally, then this seems appropriate. Additionally, as we saw in in the autoethnography and narrative inquiry rationale, these are both methods and theoretical lenses that are currently underused within LIS, and I believe there is so much potential for mobilising them in pursuit of new knowledges in LIS. Indeed, a call to action from Fourie in their seminal 2021 text on the subject of autoethnography within LIS is: "it is now time for libraries and information services facing increased pressure to address social inclusion, social injustice, the needs of marginalised and vulnerable communities and the research opportunities offered by digital and virtual worlds, to embrace a deeply inquiring method." (Fourie, 2021, p.5)

This study attempts to make a contribution to these conversations.

11.3 Implications & Call to Action

Through co-creating, taking ownership of, and critically examining narratives around public libraries, we can build novel ways of finding new knowledges and positionalities – not just on the future of public libraries in the UK, but on collective belonging and collective action within civic and community participation too.

In an increasingly polarised society where sociological, economic and ideological divides proliferate and competition is increasingly the main way in which we exchange value and meaning, the space of the library building – as a literal physical space but also as a metaphorical space where a vast range of different people interact within it – is one of the last remaining alternatives to this enforced neoliberal, individualised and competitive reality in the Western world: a space within which ideas, bodies, belief systems and information, can all be freely exchanged. It is also, as we have seen, sometimes a matter of life and death.

Let us shift the terrain that we are having the argument on entirely. For the discussion to take place within the same sphere that we are saying no longer meets the needs of the phenomena, is to still be having the conversation on that sphere's terms. We can build terrains on which to converse more soulfully, rather than from a perspective of rational efficiency, because we cannot create the answer to a question using the very tools we are saying no longer work. We must reach further, into narratives, into collective autobiographies and autoethnographies, and into other knowledges. If we do not force this shift, then public library activists, proponents and supporters will be told over and over again, to measure more and more things, in order to demonstrate value on the dysfunctional terms of the very system creating the disjuncture in the first place. The shared knowledges found in this study could be just one of many methods for shifting the basis of knowledge sufficiently enough to effectively resist the closure of public libraries in the United Kingdom. Autoethnography and narrative inquiry create space for emotions and feelings to interplay with intellectual positionalities.

We must advocate for the public library from both our minds *and* our hearts.

> *"To me the library seems to be an institution with a heart. An institution that want me the best and don't treat me like a product or a customer' ~ Library User (cited in Lauersen, 2020).*

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12. Reflection

This project began as a desire to research the history of storytelling in public libraries, in an attempt to find the narratives we tell and hold for each other on how the public library ameliorates loneliness and civic exclusion, and fosters belonging, inclusion, and connections. I always wanted to tell my own story in relation to it too – the 'why' of the research. The research

question changed somewhat, but the methodology and focus were almost entirely redesigned, something that was necessary in order to accommodate methodological holes and time constraints experienced in getting started. A copy of the original project proposal is included as Appendix B for reference.

On the literature search method: this changed enormously, prompted in part by the time constraints already mentioned. However, it was also influenced by the fact that the more I dug down into the scope and definitions, the more it became apparent that there were holes in the method which could not be overcome, such as there being too much data to analyse with some boundaries applied, and not enough data with others applied. I changed the geographical area part of the scope multiple times in order to find documents and search results that made the delivery of the literature search and content analysis realistic. When I reached a satisfactory number of case studies, reports and systematic reviews, that had been found using robust and replicable search parameters, and it looked as though they could form the basis of a good study (all the while ensuring that the quality would not be compromised in favour of time constraint concerns), I began. Global studies were used as a reference point and to add context and comparisons, and also because the core idea that narratives need to be used more widely in the value and performance measurements of public libraries was a suggestion in the main global study that I wanted to explore further, and attempt to contribute a part of the solution to.

On the content analysis tools: using NVivo to analyse the themes found within the case studies, reports and systematic reviews enabled me to show the recurrence of words and phrases with accuracy, instead of simply claiming that they were common and then using this claim to build theory – a method that would not have been rigorous, replicable, or transparent enough.

On the theory: my hope is that introducing elements of neoliberalism and constructivism to the narrative inquiry-led theoretical positioning added to the study by helping to focus on some of the smaller elements already touched on and explored within the content analysis and autoethnography. In order to be able to move into new systems of measurement and story-led ways of knowing the value of the public library, I had to critique current statistical systems of measurement first.

On the autobiographical narrative: as already stated, autoethnography was always intended to be an element within the study, but it was my supervisor who encouraged me to consider making it a significant part, for which I am very grateful, as it challenged me and enabled me to stretch the limits of what I thought was possible or permittable in academic writing. It was also my desire to be honest from the start about my personal biases in the argument for keeping the public library funded, staffed, and open – I did not want to absent myself from the research, but

rather deliberately insert myself into it. What I did not expect, and was very pleasantly surprised and excited to explore, was the focus on the body and the belonging of the body in public libraries. I still need to tell my story, even though the events within the narrative happened some time ago, and I sometimes struggled with ideas of what is appropriate to reveal in academic writing. However, I also know that the desire to appear as if I no longer carry that narrative with me comes from a preconceived and dated notions of researcher objectivity and 'having enough distance' to be able to analyse information coolly. Consequently, I ensured I used present tense and first person consistently within this section. I believe that by using the correct tools and keeping oneself accountable, we can still explore our own stories in rigorous and robust ways; and that in order to reveal a personal story, I do not somehow need to have moved past it and into a place of cool analysis. The body keeps the score, and those narratives remain a part of me. I think it is the job of all writing and knowledge creation – not just academic – to unpick ideas of 'appropriateness'. Perhaps, sometimes, the way to do this is by making oneself vulnerable.

On ethics: rigorous critical examination of the effect my writings can have on others had to be a part of this research process. I did not explore ethics in the main body of this study as the information in the narratives analysed via content analysis are in the public domain, but when considering the use of autoethnography, ethics was a consideration that was constantly at play in the background, pushing me to think about any possible effects this study could conceivably have on any still-living implicated characters within the autobiographical element. As a result of these considerations, I made a conscious decision to omit all detail about the adverse childhood experiences that led to my dependence on libraries for survival, and curated the rest of the childhood section on a granular level, with each word considered carefully. As it happened, those narrative threads were irrelevant to the scope of this study anyhow – however, even if they had not have been, I would have made the same decision and written in the same way. Fourie (2021, p.92) implores autoethnographers to be truthful and honest, but also to respect the rights and privacy of others, demonstrating mindful writing always.

I found it extremely enriching, exciting, rewarding, and at times uncomfortable, to attempt to bring together academic writing and personal writing. There were moments when reading the user and staff narratives by and about them, when my emotional reaction to the testimonies of people who found themselves feeling less lonely as a direct result of their library service reinforced why I had wanted to undertake this project in the first place – I am inextricably linked to those people with common experiences; we are the same. There were other moments where, in attempting to research consciously and reflexively, I had to dig deeper, deconstruct what I was writing, and ask why I was including it – which was emotionally and intellectually

challenging. However, I also believe that being uncomfortable is often necessary in order to advance past a current way of thinking, and in order to hold myself accountable in my work.

Areas for further study: two interesting areas identified were "finding out whether library activities and events create sustained and long-lasting friendship groups outside of the library and without the presence of library staff – then looking at all the possibilities of what that could mean, both for the institution of the public library itself, and for related concepts of togetherness and collective belonging in society at large," and "theories on how libraries contribute to 'inclusive economic growth,' where positive economic outcomes are shared equally across all demographics and libraries act as digital anchor institutions – something that is increasingly being recognised by planning and policy authorities as a method of democratising economic development in communities and acknowledging the connections between employability and economic contribution, and civic and community inclusion, thereby lessening social divides and inequalities."

Overall, this project feels like a satisfactory initial look into the subject, and I believe, sets the ground for future studies to build on – especially with regards to the autoethnographical and narrative inquiry elements, which does not seem to have been carried out yet in quite the same way within the discipline of LIS.

Thank you for reading.

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13. Ethics & Confidentiality

Ethical concerns are explored in the Reflection section that precedes this one. The City University CityLIS Ethics Checklist was included in the original proposal which follows as Appendix B.

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Appendix A – List of Libraries

This is a list of the 17 libraries that this study was written in:

- Whitechapel Public Library (Ideastore), Tower Hamlets, London
- Cubitts Town Public Library, Tower Hamlets, London
- Watney Market Public Library (Ideastore), Tower Hamlets, London
- Bethnal Green Public Library, Tower Hamlets, London
- Bow Public Library (Ideastore), Tower Hamlets, London
- Chrisp Street Market Public Library (Ideastore), Tower Hamlets, London
- Finsbury Public Library, Islington, London
- Islington South Public Library, Islington, London
- City, University of London Library, Islington, London
- Shoreditch Public Library, Hackney, London
- Bishopsgate Institute Library & Archives, City of London
- Barbican Centre Library, City of London
- British Library, Kings Cross, London
- Hebden Bridge Public Library, Calder Valley, West Yorkshire
- Sowerby Bridge Public Library, Calder Valley, West Yorkshire
- Halifax Central Public Library, Calderdale, West Yorkshire
- Manchester Central Library, Greater Manchester

Additionally, the 9 main libraries I used as a child and young woman:

- Radlett Public Library, Hertfordshire
- Borehamwood Public Library (now relocated), Hertfordshire
- Watford Central Public Library, Hertfordshire
- North Watford Public Library, Hertfordshire
- Hemel Hempstead Central Public Library, Hertfordshire
- Hemel Hempstead Adeyfield Public Library, Hertfordshire
- East Barnet Public Library (now closed), Barnet, London
- St Albans Central Library, Hertfordshire
- Rickmansworth Public Library, Hertfordshire

Appendix B – Original Project Proposal

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

LIBRARY SCIENCE PROGRAMME: CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

BY SAM DODD [SUPERVISOR: DAVID BAWDEN]

Working Title

Story Driven, Not Data Driven: Measuring the Value of Public Library Buildings in Great Britain Using Narratives of Inclusion, Belonging, and Loneliness

Working Question

What does storytelling in and about libraries tell us about how much the physical public library is valued, in which ways, and by whom – and how do we measure narratives of inclusion, belonging and loneliness in a way that enables us to mobilise the findings to highlight the value of the public library building?

~

Introduction

Public libraries in Great Britain have been closing at an average rate of 77 per year since the introduction of austerity in 2010 (The Guardian, 2019) with, at the time of writing, many more fearing closure as a direct result of budget hits from COVID-19 (The Guardian, 2020). As a statutory service that is free at the point of use and thus not subjected to the same data-driven, profit-driven ideals that many other public services are under a neoliberal agenda, difficulties arise when measuring value with an aim of supporting the case for the continued public funding of library 'bricks and mortar' and the staff that run them.

There is a profound sociological, ethical and moral value in having a community building that provides leisure, educational resources, information services, connectivity, and other essential public services - all for free - to absolutely anyone. The physical building matters: it is a space that practices and represents inclusion and belonging for all citizens. As society increases its dependence on digital solutions and e-governance, retaining these spaces is becoming more and more urgent, to avoid leaving any citizens behind. Therefore, what can we learn from narratives about libraries that have themes of loneliness, inclusion, belonging and isolation – why is it important to look at these narratives? This study will seek to explore the possibility that the trauma the individual experiences from social exclusion, disconnection and loneliness can be ameliorated by the non-entrepreneurially subjectified, free and open to all, services and physical space that the library building provides. Using thematically analysed narratives of inclusion, belonging and loneliness it will seek to develop and suggest a method by which the value of the public library can be measured, one that adds to the existing body of knowledge on this subject, and is an alternative to neoliberal profit- and data-driven measuring tools that institutions such as public libraries are currently expected to adhere to, in order to justify ongoing funding from the public purse.

There have been multiple studies across Great Britain on projects that alleviate loneliness and isolation that are held in and run by libraries, all of which will be present in a comprehensive literature review and some of which will be analysed as case studies, as just one element of a diverse and mixed method methodology. There are also a multitude of narratives and testimonies on the sociological value of the physical library building, and more examples than this of narratives written both in libraries, and about libraries, about their ability to provide a non-entrepreneurially subjectified and non-commercialised space in society, that is free and open to all citizens, regardless of their demographic individualities or backgrounds. However, as yet there is no comprehensive study that pulls together all these projects, narratives and testimonies on inclusion, belonging and loneliness, sorts them by theme, underpins the findings

with theory, and develops measures that can be taken forward and used by other researchers or even campaigners who seek to stop library closures. An ideal use for this study, once complete, is that the findings be used to influence local or central policy, and/or in the general societal conversation around the continued public funding of the library and the importance of equality in information access and non-commercialised spaces for citizens to feel they belong to. An additional relevance of this study to the field of LIS is this: the more public library buildings remain open and available to all; the more we assess the value of measuring tools other than number-driven ones; the more we look at narratives as a way of finding value – the more information equality and therefore, perhaps, overall equality, will result in society at large.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault (2008, p.120) describes neoliberal governmentality as "a formal game between inequalities", where competition becomes generalised as the primary mode not only of social institutions and interaction, but of individuality itself. I will argue that in a society where we are becoming more and more individualised and separate, and competition is more and more the way in which we exchange value and meaning – and in a society where sociological, economic and ideological divides proliferate, possibly partly as a result of this 'competition not collaboration' mentality – perhaps the space of the library building… as a literal physical space but also as a metaphorical space where a vast range of different people interact within it… is one of the last remaining alternatives to this enforced neoliberal and competitive reality in the Western world, or GB to be specific to this study: a space within which ideas, bodies, belief systems and information, can all be freely exchanged.

~

Scope & Definition

This study will concentrate on public libraries in Great Britain – many of the resources assessed so far either do not include Northern Irish libraries or use differing measurement parameters

for presenting their public library data to those used by public libraries and associated bodies in GB.

For the purposes of this study, the 'narratives' utilised will include stories written in libraries and about libraries, thematically grouped (the theme groupings and sub-groupings are explored in the Methodology section of this proposal), and the narrative outputs from projects conceived by libraries and their local governmental and/or community partners that tackle loneliness and isolation in the community – either assessed in general terms, or in a few select case studies analysed in depth. The study will not look at storytelling initiatives involving children, simply in order to a) narrow the scope of the project and make deliverability more feasible and realistic, and b) be specific to the social reality that British adults experience and narratively assess how loneliness in adults is ameliorated by the availability of public library buildings.

~

Aims & Objectives

This study seeks to firstly find themes in the existing literature, both academic and otherwise: themes in stories written about libraries and from within libraries on the role of the public library in fostering safe spaces for learning, access to research, and information sharing; themes in experiences of the digital divide from populations that use the library for information gathering or civic participation by using stories and accounts of and by them; themes in stories written about the public library, or from within public libraries that reference the importance of the physical building and type of space and environment it fosters for the creative process; and themes of inclusion, belonging, connectivity, and the lessening of loneliness and isolation through the programmes and activities provided at libraries, as well as the core informational services provided. The project then seeks to underpin the findings and develop a method of value assessment via theory triangulation, using elements of narrative research, phenomenological theory, and autoethnography – explained in the following section.

Research Methodology & Literature Review

Mixed Method: Comprehensive Literature Review & Case Studies

The study will begin with a comprehensive literature review, which will inform a mixed-method approach to the rest of the project. This particular type of literature review has been chosen because it is a methodologically thorough and also holistic approach to documenting the current state of knowledge about a selected topic as related to philosophical assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016), which supports the aims of this study in moving away from pure data and statistics. This will involve analysing narratives for themes as laid out in the previous section; all the research literature on storytelling and narrative research as ways of knowing and measuring data sociologically and for developing impactful local and central policy; and all other resources it is possible to find and that fall within the scope of the project.

Case studies will also be analysed, specifically two to three examples of where storytelling initiatives and projects to alleviate loneliness in the community have taken place in public libraries. One of these case studies will be a public engagement research project that the author of this research project coordinates, named CityLife (2021). Permission has been sought and gained from the project directors to analyse and quote material from this project, which is all in the public domain. Another case study will be the Manchester Libraries survey conducted that found using libraries reduced loneliness (CIPFA, 2020).

I will then synthesise the comprehensive literature review and case studies, again by using themes. The list of themes so far – though this will be built on and amended – are as follows:

<u>Connectivity</u>

- Emotional Connectivity: connections that are made in the library space
- Informational Connectivity: an informed populace is an active one, a healthier one

- Bodily connectivity: loneliness and isolation, the physical building as an energetic space shared by multiple types of bodies, storytelling as a way of bringing people together
- Social connectivity: linked to emotional connectivity - isolation, participation in programs run by and in libraries, a way of meeting people

Bodies

- Body as information
- Body as knowledge
- Representation of the body; the way a community or society views different types of bodies; bodies in public spaces
- Movement as information; information as movement
- Information as non-static thing

Loneliness, Belonging and Inclusion

- Mentions of loneliness and isolation – keyword analysis
- Mentions of belonging – keyword analysis
- Mentions of inclusion – keyword analysis

(Note: the keywords the project uses in this last section are still to be developed; there are endless possibilities for words that are synonyms for the above search terms, and a practical and achievable list will need to be developed with sound reasons for exclusions and inclusions of the words used, as well as finding culturally accurate synonyms and words too, for the different groups of people using libraries).

~

The themes list and resulting findings will then inform each element of the theoretical basis of the study, as laid out in the following section; in addition, reflective practice on this process will feed into the autoethnographical element and inform a creative writing element:

Theory Triangulation

The study will use theory triangulation to tie the mixed method findings together and develop a method for assessing value in narratives and using that method to justify the ongoing funding of the public library. In no particular order of emphasis or weight: firstly, elements of narrative research will be drawn on, for as Bruce et al (2016) suggest, "the narrative turn is a term used primarily in literary studies, social, and human sciences and expresses a shift toward legitimizing peoples' stories as important sources of empirical knowledge." Secondly, phenomenological theory will be utilised, as this approach emphasises subjectivity and does not look for comparisons between narratives (in opposition to the themes and similarities that will be explicitly sought by using the case study comparisons, thereby offering a much more thorough analysis of all available information on this subject), and analyses people's perceptions, belief systems, feelings and emotions. It is a style of research that does not rely on statistics (Denscombe, 2014, p.94; Pickard, 2007, p.241) which supports the aim of this study: to move away from number-driven (e.g. profit-driven) modes of measurement. Lastly, an autoethnographical element will be used to complement and augment the theoretical grounding of this study: I will analyse my own experience as a lifelong user of public libraries via short paragraphs of reflective creative writing that play with ideas of the body as metadata; explore the process of writing a dissertation about public libraries from within public library buildings through meta-fiction and/or meta-research; think about myself as an informational entity within the information-space; and other yet to be decided possible avenues for autoethnography. Autoethnography is desirable as one element of the research methodology because, as Ellis and Bochner (2006) suggest, there are broadly two types of autoethnography – evocative (foregrounding the writer's personal stories) and analytical (connecting to some broader set of social phenomena), both of which are relevant to the study. In addition, I will use memo-writing, a method that Pickard (2007, p.245) describes as a formal process of commenting on the data as a running commentary on the themes that are emerging.

Finally, before submission, I will conduct an 'analysis of original research' in the style of the assignment set for module INM356: Research Methods & Communication, in order to weed out any holes in the methodology and mitigate any potential bias that may have arisen during the study.

~

Dissemination

The dissertation will be posted permanently on Humanities Commons and on my own website. I will also contact the authors of various well-known public libraries blogs and Twitter accounts, and national organisations such as Libraries Connected, Libraries Taskforce and CILIP, to ask if they would be interested in reading and potentially sharing it with their networks. Wherever possible, I will attend relevant conferences and apply to speak at them. Lastly, I will talk to various individual librarians across the Borough of Tower Hamlets, to let them know this work has been done, if they are interested in reading it – it is my local area, I will be writing a large amount of the dissertation in said libraries, and there is therefore a personal connection to these buildings and services for me.

I believe that for research to be effectively disseminated, it first needs to be accessible to all audiences, so this dissertation will avoid the overuse of academic terminology as far as is possible without compromising the integrity of the research.

~

Work Plan & Contact Points

	May	June	July	August	September
Literature Review					
Design & Refine methodology					
Checkpoint					
First Draft					
Checkpoint					
Second Draft					
Checkpoint					
Final Draft					

Resources

I will need access to City University Library and all physical and digital resources within, for the literature review and methodology design and refining.

I will the internet and a printer, both of which I have at home and can access from public libraries and City University Library also.

I will utilise publicly available data on the case studies I am looking at and will contact all organisations to disclose that I am using this data. Where necessary, I will ask for additional data, if it does not inconvenience said organisations.

I will need access to public library catalogues to augment and enrich my findings and assist with the literature reviews.

Ethics & Confidentiality

There are no foreseeable ethical issues with this research project, and the City University

CityLIS Ethics Checklist has been included at the end of this proposal to support this claim.

Research Ethics Review Form: CityLIS dissertation projects

CityLIS students undertaking their dissertation project are required to consider the ethics of their project work and to ensure that it complies with research ethics guidelines. Usually approval will be given by the supervisor, but in some cases a project will need approval from an ethics committee before it can proceed.

In order to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to ethical issues, all students must complete this form and attach it to their dissertation proposal. There are two parts:

PART A: Ethics Checklist. All students must complete this part. The checklist identifies whether the project requires ethical approval and, if so, where to apply for approval.

PART B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form. Students who have answered "no" to all questions in A1, A2 and A3 and "yes" to question 4 in A4 in the ethics checklist must complete this part. The project supervisor has delegated authority to provide approval in such cases that are considered to involve minimal risk.

A.1 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from an appropriate external ethics committee for approval. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.		*Delete as appropriate*
1.1	Does your research require approval from the National Research Ethics Service (NRES)? *e.g. because you are recruiting current NHS patients or staff?* *If you are unsure try - https://www.hra.nhs.uk/approvals-amendments/what-approvals-do-i-need/*	**NO**
1.2	Will you recruit participants who fall under the auspices of the Mental Capacity Act? *Such research needs to be approved by an external ethics committee such as NRES or the Social Care Research Ethics Committee - http://www.scie.org.uk/research/ethics-committee/*	**NO**
1.3	Will you recruit any participants who are currently under the auspices of the Criminal Justice System, for example, but not limited to, people on remand, prisoners and those on probation? *Such research needs to be authorised by the ethics approval system of the National Offender Management Service.*	**NO**
A.2 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, approval will be needed from the Senate Research Ethics Committee. Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.		*Delete as appropriate*
2.1	Does your research involve participants who are unable to give informed consent? *For example, but not limited to, people who may have a degree of learning disability or mental health problem, that means they are unable to make an informed decision on their own behalf.*	**NO**

2.2	Is there a risk that your research might lead to disclosures from participants concerning their involvement in illegal activities?	**NO**
2.3	Is there a risk that obscene and or illegal material may need to be accessed for your research study (including online content and other material)?	**NO**
2.4	Does your project involve participants disclosing information about special category or sensitive subjects? *For example, but not limited to: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious beliefs; trade union membership; physical or mental health; sexual life; criminal offences and proceedings*	**NO**
2.5	Does your research involve you travelling to another country outside of the UK, where the Foreign & Commonwealth Office has issued a travel warning that affects the area in which you will study? *Please check the latest guidance from the FCO - http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/*	**NO**
2.6	Does your research involve invasive or intrusive procedures? *These may include, but are not limited to, electrical stimulation, heat, cold or bruising.*	**NO**
2.7	Does your research involve animals?	**NO**
2.8	Does your research involve the administration of drugs, placebos or other substances to study participants?	**NO**
A.3 If you answer YES to any of the questions in this block, then approval will be needed from the Computer Science /Library and Information Science Research Ethics Committee (CSREC). Consult your supervisor if you think this may be the case.		*Delete as appropriate*
3.1	Does your research involve participants who are under the age of 18?	**NO**
3.2	Does your research involve adults who are vulnerable because of their social, psychological or medical circumstances (vulnerable adults)? *This includes adults with cognitive and / or learning disabilities, adults with physical disabilities and older people.*	**NO**
3.3	Are participants recruited because they are staff or students of City, University of London? *For example, students studying on a particular course or module.* *If yes, then approval is also required from the Head of Department or Programme Director.*	**NO**
3.4	Does your research involve intentional deception of participants?	**NO**
3.5	Does your research involve participants taking part without their informed consent?	**NO**
3.5	Is the risk posed to participants greater than that in normal working life?	**NO**

3.7	Is the risk posed to you, the researcher(s), greater than that in normal working life?	**NO**
A.4 If you answer YES to the following question and your answers to all other questions in sections A1, A2 and A3 are NO, then your project is of minimal risk. **If this is the case, then you can apply for approval through your supervisor under PROPORTIONATE REVIEW. You do so by completing PART B of this form.** **If you have answered NO to all questions in the checklist, including question 4, then your project does not require ethical approval. You should still include the form in your dissertation proposal.**		*Delete as appropriate*
4	Does your project involve human participants or their identifiable personal data? *For example, as interviewees, respondents to a survey, or participants in testing.*	**NO**

PART B: Ethics Proportionate Review Form

If you answered YES to question 4 and NO to all other questions in sections A1, A2 and A3 in PART A (checklist) of this form, then you should complete PART B of this form to submit an application for a proportionate ethics review of your project. Your supervisor has delegated authority to review and approve this application under proportionate review. Your proposal, including this ethics application, must be approved by your supervisor before beginning the planned research.

If you cannot provide all the required attachments (see B.3) with your project proposal (e.g. because you have not yet written the consent forms, interview schedules etc), you must submit the missing items to your supervisor for approval prior to commencing these parts of your project.

Your supervisor may ask you to submit a full ethics application through Research Ethics Online, if they are unable to give approval.

B.1 The following questions must be answered fully.		*Delete as appropriate*
1.1.	Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the purpose of the research?	**N/A**
1.2	Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including information about how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long it will be kept?	**N/A**
1.3	When people agree to participate in your project, will it be made clear to them that they may withdraw (i.e. not participate) at any time without any penalty?	**N/A**
1.4	Will consent be obtained from the participants in your project? Consent from participants will be necessary if you plan to involve them in your project or if you plan to use identifiable personal data from existing records. "Identifiable personal data" means data relating to a living person who might be identifiable if the record includes their name, username, student id, DNA, fingerprint, address, etc.	**N/A**

	If YES, you must attach drafts of the participant information sheet(s) and consent form(s) that you will use in section B.3 or, in the case of an existing dataset, provide details of how consent has been obtained. *You must also retain the completed forms for subsequent inspection. Failure to provide the completed consent request forms will result in withdrawal of any earlier ethical approval of your project.*	
1.5	Have you made arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential?	**N/A**

B.2 If the answer to the following question (B2) is YES, you must provide details		*Delete as appropriate*
2	Will the research be conducted in the participant's home or other non-University location? *If **YES**, you must provide details of how your safety will be ensured.*	**N/A**

B.3 Attachments **All of the following documents must be provided to supervisors if applicable. If they are not available when the proposal is submitted, they must be approved by the supervisor later.**	***YES***	***NO***	***Not Applicable***
Details on how safety will be assured in any non-University location, including risk assessment if required (see B2)			**N/A**
Details of arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential (see B1.5) *Any personal data must be acquired, stored and made accessible in ways that are GDPR compliant.*			**N/A**
Full protocol for any workshops or interviews**			**N/A**
Participant information sheet(s)**			**N/A**
Consent form(s)**			**N/A**
Questionnaire(s)** *sharing a Qualtrics survey with your supervisor is recommended.*			**N/A**
Topic guide(s) for interviews and focus groups**			**N/A**
Permission from external organisations or Head of Department** *e.g. for recruitment of participants*			**N/A**

Appendix C: Original NVivo Nodes Before Thematic Aggregation	Files	References
Belonging	12	91
Books	5	12
Change	7	15
Civic & Citizen Services Access	10	41
Communication and Talking	10	43
Community	11	102
Connection	12	86
Covid-19	4	23
Deprivation, Low Income, Poverty	6	24
Digital Exclusion, Divide	8	49
Digital Inclusion, Skills, Offerings	8	49
Disability or Impairment	5	15
Economy or Employment	5	35
Emotions	7	13
Health and Wellbeing	11	106
Information Literacy, Information Behaviour	4	8
In-person Events	8	32
Isolated	8	80
Less Free Time	1	1
Library Closures	5	15
Library Reduces Loneliness	8	38
Library Staff	11	80
Local Authority	8	30
Local Partnerships	8	36
Local Resident, Library User	10	66
Loneliness	9	91
Men	2	5
Mobile Library Services	2	13
New Experiences	3	14
New Library Offers	8	51
NHS	3	9
No Internet Access	4	9
Older people	8	22
Positive Impact	10	74
Racial Minorities	3	5
Reaching Users	12	98
Refugees, Asylum Seekers	2	23
Remote working	2	2
Restrictions	3	15
Sensemaking, Placemaking	7	19
Social Inclusion	12	80
Support and Training	9	50
Tackling poverty.	0	0
Value of libraries	10	39
Volunteers, Volunteering	6	22
Vulnerable or Marginalised	9	47
Women	4	8
Younger people	8	19

Appendix D: Bibliographic Index of Final Literature Search Docs

An index of the screened and included final literature search documents used for the content analysis, grouped by document type. These are replicated from the preceding reference list.

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Academic Papers

Cavanagh, M. F. (2015) 'Structuring an Action Net of Public Library Membership', *Library Quarterly*, 85(4), pp. 406–426. doi: 10.1086/682734.

Sung, H.Y., Hepworth, M. & Ragsdell, G. (2013) 'Investigating essential elements of community engagement in public libraries: An exploratory qualitative study', *Journal of Librarianship & Information Science*, 45(3), pp. 206–218. doi: 10.1177/0961000612448205.

Case Studies

CIPFA (2020) *Manchester Libraries – Research into how libraries help people with loneliness and isolation.* Available at: https://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/reports/manchester-libraries-research-into-how-libraries-help-people-with-loneliness-and-isolation (Accessed: 26th August 2021).

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2021) *Read, Talk, Share: How the Reading Agency Helped Tackle Loneliness.* Available at: https://dcmslibraries.blog.gov.uk/2021/07/07/read-talk-share-how-the-reading-agency-helped-libraries-tackle-loneliness/ (Accessed: 1st September 2021).

Libraries Week (2021a) *Case Study: Connecting Merton.* Available at: http://librariesweek.org.uk/case-study-connecting-merton/ (Accessed: 31st August 2021).

Libraries Week (2021b) *Case Study: Virtually Together – East Renfrewshire Libraries Tackling Social Isolation & Loneliness.* Available at: http://librariesweek.org.uk/case-study-virtually-together/ (Accessed: 31st August 2021).

Reports

CILIP (2016) *The Value of Trained Library and Information Professionals.* Available at: https://www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip_new_website/research/value_trained_

information_professionals/value_trained_lik_pro_summar.pdf Accessed: 31st August 2021).

CILIP (2018) *Public Libraries: The Case for Support.* Available at: https://www.librariesdeliver.uk/reportnews (Accessed: 31st August 2021).

Libraries Connected (2019) *Scoping study towards a blueprint for public library development and sustainability in England.* Available at: https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/sites/default/files/Scoping%20Study%20Towards%20A%20Blueprint.pdf (Accessed: 1st September 2021).

Libraries Connected (2020) *Libraries in Lockdown: Connecting Communities in Crisis.* Available: https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/sites/default/files/Libraries%20in%20Lockdown%20-%20final%20report_0.docx (Accessed 1st September 2021).

Moore Kingston Smith (2019) *Suffolk Libraries: A Predictive Impact Analysis.* Available at: https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/assets/pdf/suffolk-libraries-a-predictive-impact-analysis.pdf (Accessed: 31st August 2021).

Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2007) *Welcome to Your Library – connecting public libraries and refugee communities: Evaluation Report.* Available at: www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/WTYLEvaluationReportrevisedversion.pdf (Accessed: 31st August 2021).

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Total documents: 12

Appendix E: Index of Database & Site Search Permalinks & URL's

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LISTA Academic Database

Search 1	Search 2	Search 3

Libraries Connected

'Loneliness' keyword search	'Belonging' keyword search

Public Libraries News

'Loneliness' keyword search	'Belonging' keyword search

CILIP

'Loneliness' keyword search	'Belonging' keyword search