

# Work, Leisure and Social Participation

**Older Adults' Perceptions and Experiences of Information and Communication Technologies** L. Hurd, C. Tran, E. Delorme, E. V. Bennett, and W. B. Mortenson. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

**Purpose** The World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>1</sup> states that social isolation in later life is a rising public health issue, as 20 to 34% of older adults experience loneliness. Studies have found that information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g., cell phones, computers, social media, video conferencing, and messaging apps) mitigate loneliness and social isolation among older adults.<sup>2</sup> Yet questions remain as to how older adults' adoption or rejection of ICTs is linked to their experiences of loneliness and social isolation. **Method** To examine the meanings that older adults attribute to ICTs, we drew upon an intersectional life course perspective<sup>3</sup> and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 older adults, aged 65 to 89 (average age of 75). Participants were diverse with respect to their gender identity, sexual orientation, partner status, country of origin, cultural identity, physical abilities, household income, and use of ICTs. Participants were interviewed for between 1.25 and 2.5 hours and were asked about their life histories, general engagement with technology, perceptions, and specific use of ICTs, and experiences of social connection and loneliness. We analyzed the data using descriptive thematic analysis.<sup>4</sup> **Results and Discussion** We identified three main themes. The first theme, technology (re)shapes human interactions, entailed participants' reflections on how ICTs enabled communication that was simultaneously efficient and direct yet also often intrusive and shallow. The second theme, technology as necessary for connection, encompassed participants' perspectives that ICTs enabled them to connect with significant others, both locally and globally, more easily than ever before. In contrast, the final theme, technology as promoting alienation and disconnection, referred to participants' feelings of frustration with and lack of access to rapidly changing and increasingly complex ICTs. We consider how our participants' perceptions and experiences were shaped by their social locations (e.g., age, gender, ability, and social class), personal biographies, and access to technology over the life course. Our findings point to the need for ICT alternatives that prioritize simplicity and accessibility for all ages, abilities, and incomes. Additionally, our findings highlight the importance of supportive learning environments in which older adults can increase their confidence and competence in using technology.

## References

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