

Older Women and Political Agency: A Scoping Review of the Literature

Mujeres Mayores y Agencia Política: Una Revisión Exploratoria de la Literatura

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Older women's political agency has not been widely explored in the literature on ageing. In general, this group has been researched from the ageing characteristics perspective—decay, fragility, adaptive processes—or considering those dimensions in which their capacity for agency lessens ageing symptoms. However, the implications and political character of their practices tends to be ignored. This scoping review examines the approaches to older women's political agency found in the 1975-2020 academic production. We conducted this scoping review according to PRISMA-ScR guidelines and Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework. Sixty-five articles were included in the revision and a full thematic content analysis of the selected corpus was conducted. Qualitative methods were incorporated in 75 % of the examined articles that were conducted in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Diverse approaches to the topic of political agency were identified with community participation, activism, and trajectories of coping and resilience standing out. The relational and collective character of the processes of agency are paramount in the specific strategies that women develop to face vital transitions. Older women's political agency takes place in a range of social spaces, having a relevant impact at the social-public and the domestic level. A situated characterization of political agency in older women can help guide and redefine public actions, contributing to a greater recognition of these women's experiences, actions, and contributions.

Keywords: political participation, empowerment, activism, female ageing, agency

La agencia política de las mujeres adultas mayores ha sido escasamente explorada en la literatura científica. En general, este grupo suele ser investigado desde las características del envejecimiento —deterioro, fragilidad, procesos adaptativos— o desde aquellas dimensiones donde su capacidad de agencia aminora los síntomas del envejecer. No obstante, el carácter político e implicativo de sus prácticas suele ser ignorado. Este estudio describe el abordaje de las conceptualizaciones existentes en torno a las mujeres adultas mayores y agencia política desde la producción académica entre los años 1975-2020, que identifica temas clave, las dimensiones desarrolladas, así como los desafíos futuros. Realizamos esta revisión exploratoria, que sigue las orientaciones PRISMA-ScR y la propuesta metodológica de Arksey y O'Malley (2005). Sesenta y cinco artículos fueron incluidos en la revisión y se realizó un análisis de contenido temático del corpus seleccionado. Un 75 % de los artículos incorporaron métodos cualitativos y se concentraron en países como Canadá, Estados Unidos y el Reino Unido. Se identificaron diversas formas para abordar la agencia política, donde destacaron la participación comunitaria, el activismo y las trayectorias de afrontamiento y resiliencia. Las mujeres mayores desarrollan estrategias específicas para enfrentar las transiciones vitales, donde el carácter colectivo y relacional de los procesos de agenciamiento son centrales. La agencia política se realiza en diferentes espacios contextuales; su incidencia destaca tanto a nivel público-social, como a nivel doméstico. La descripción situada de los procesos de agenciamiento político de las mujeres mayores puede orientar y redefinir las acciones públicas, de cara a un mayor reconocimiento de sus experiencias, acciones y contribuciones.

Palabras clave: participación política, empoderamiento, activismo, envejecimiento femenino, agencia

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In Western societies, ageing adequately is linked to factors that either promote or hinder a person's chances of reaching old age in good health (Wray, 2004, 2007). Agency, defined as the capacity for action (Wray, 2003a), and participation, defined as involvement in actions aimed at social improvement (Serrat & Villar, 2020), are psychosocial resources that have been studied for their impact and positive influence on the communal and personal well-being of older adults (Zaidi & Howse, 2017). Both agency and participation are considered to be central dimensions for the promotion of quality of life in old age (Gonzales et al., 2015) and for the enhancement of cognitive functions (Proulx et al., 2018). These notions are linked to descriptive, mainstream social psychology, which is not usually interested in the political positioning of its subjects (Ibáñez, 2001).

Some studies have addressed older men and women's agency processes, showing that these may be influenced by traditional gender roles throughout a person's life (Ramos, 2018). However, the focus of scholarly production in older populations has generally overlooked the gendered dimension of agency (Serrat & Villar, 2020). Likewise, the elderly's political involvement has been historically undermined due to activism being commonly associated to youngsters (Subirats, 2018); even so, when it is researched, authors have found that it is limited by civic participation (Serrat & Villar, 2020).

In this regard, the existing literature, including research conducted from a feminist perspective, has scarcely inquired into the agency and political action of older women (Caissie, 2011; Freixas, 2021). In contrast, another group of studies with approaches informed by critical social psychology has been strongly influenced by feminist perspectives, enriching their understanding of social, political, and historical processes as well as gender and domination structures (Íñiguez-Rueda, 2005; Troncoso & Piper, 2015). These influences contribute to understanding the processes of ageing and agency in old age.

Research has shown that the experiences and participation of older women in associative spaces contribute to their life projects and personal self-knowledge (Chazan, 2016; Mchugh, 2012). It has also established that older women's life trajectories can influence their modes of agency in old age and the value attributed to it (Charpentier et al., 2008), exploring how older women utilize new strategies and diverse collective action repertoires adapted to their own subjective experience with ageing (Mazzucchelli, Reyes-Espejo & Íñiguez-Rueda, 2021; Chazan, 2016). However, the recognition of the potential and resources available to older women is still a pending task for gerontological research (Freixas, 2021; González & Lube, 2020). This oversight poses a challenge for the gerontological field, encouraging researchers to find ways to identify expressions of agency in women's old age and determine the ways in which these are either promoted or hindered (Grenier & Phillipson, 2013; Ramos, 2018).

The present scoping review intends to contribute to the description of the knowledge produced about older women and their political agency. Although the 1970s mark the emergence of ageing studies in the social sciences, this review is focused on the 1975-2020 period, as we want to show that the specificities of women and ageing were not addressed until much later (Ramos, 2018). However, it is important to note that early ageing studies rendered older women invisible. Moreover, as the literature shows, the relationship between gender and age was not a concern for feminism until the 1990s (González & Lube, 2020). The second goal of this scoping review is to identify any gaps and challenges that may persist in the field of gender-sensitive gerontological studies and, thus, to contribute to a further development of the field.

Older Women and Political Agency

Agency refers to the capacity of individuals for action, and it is frequently used in the gerontological field in relation to successful ageing (Wray, 2003b). The literature about old age considers that good levels of health, activity, and independence are required for older adults to develop agency (Subirats, 2018). Similarly, *empowerment* is used to refer to an increase in people's autonomy and self-awareness; two capabilities that enable people to exercise roles, functions, and rights. This term acquires centrality in old age since it is considered that, at this stage, there may be multiple aspects that cause people to lose power and hinder their decision-making capacities (Galenkamp et al., 2016). However, the terms *agency* and *empowerment* are usually used in an undifferentiated and acritical manner in the literature, mainly focusing on the adaptive capabilities that individuals develop and reducing these to indicators of success or failure for this stage of life (Wray, 2004, 2007). This conceptual generalization of agency ignores the fact that it could develop differently in men and women in old age, according to their specific life transitions, time availability, changes in social roles, and eventual loss of autonomy (Galenkamp et al., 2016). Furthermore, this approach leaves out the places where and the ways in which women make use of their agency, considering that the male

“universal” model, based on values such as rationality, freedom, and autonomy, is clearly differentiated from the female one (Mouffe, 1999).

In contrast, in feminist studies, both agency and politics have taken a central role in epistemological and philosophical debates, making great contributions to the field around the subjects of subjectivity, oppression, and the subjection of women (Kirkwood, 2010). These perspectives have denaturalized some epistemological assumptions of modernity, such as the famous sex/gender, nature/culture, or private/public dichotomies (Haraway, 1995). In this vein, the category of “individual” as public, universal, and homogeneous—masculine—is challenged, just as the assumption that it operates as an exclusion principle, devaluing and relegating the private as different—feminine (Mouffe, 1999). It is in this dualism that we find multiple feminist critiques on the invisibility of the power mechanisms that have been reproduced there, oppressing all private and public action (Kirkwood, 2010). Moreover, Bell Hooks (1990) draws and expands on the definition of everyday life as a political start, where “homeplace” is understood as a space for action. The household is thus considered a space in which women can reflect about exclusion and patriarchal oppression, with the potential to contribute to acts of resistance to challenge patriarchal systems of oppression. Some feminisms enable the political space presentation from “the private sphere” perspective and the organization of everyday life; in other words, that which is usually excluded from traditional politics (Kirkwood, 2010).

In this literature review, we understand politics from a feminist point of view that seeks to transform those practices, discourses, and relations where being a “woman” is constructed in a way that results in subjection (Mouffe, 1999). Likewise, in this study, a subject’s capacity for action is equivalent to the possibility of acting, or as the actions of subjects aimed at modifying the existing constitutive contexts and rules of their lives. This is something that cannot be reduced to an individual property; rather, it must be understood as the outcome of shared responsibilities and relationships and as actions through which the very subject is constructed and reproduced (Ema, 2004). Similarly, we understand political agency as the capacity of older women to act within their daily contexts to confront their oppressions (Hooks, 1999; Kirkwood, 2010). We suggest this capacity not to be reduced exclusively to civic or public participation, in order to be valued for its political character. On the contrary, we underline that women’s political agency starts from multiple locations, through practices that contribute to bringing out to the public what has been commonly silenced and excluded (e.g. femininity, nature, relationships, caregiving, housework, emotions) (Kirkwood, 2010). Therefore, women’s social practices should be understood according to their situated character, in order to recognize their freeing political agencies in their collective nature (Cañas, 2018).

Based on the above, we consider that older women enact their political agency by reproducing, maintaining, and/or transforming their social life. Keeping that in mind, we sought to widely research political agency in the context of scientific production. We searched for the terms “agency” and “empowerment”, which are frequently used in the gerontological field, to be able to study a range of approaches that express older women’s political agency.

Research Design and Methods

We chose a scoping or exploratory review method, as it enables an approach to the limited academic literature on older women’s agency. The review was conducted according to the classical stages (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005) and reported following PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018). Our review followed Arksey and O’Malley’s five stages (2005): (i) identification of the research questions; (ii) identification of relevant studies associated to the subject matter; (iii) study selection; (iv) information mapping; and (v) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results (Levac et al., 2010). The following are the details of the methodological steps involved in each stage.

Stage 1: Identification of the Research Questions

Two questions were formulated as a starting point for the review: What has been the scholarly production regarding older women and political agency during the 1975-2020 period? What are the gaps in the existing gerontological literature and what challenges should be tackled by future research?

Stage 2: Identification of Relevant Studies

The search for relevant literature, conducted between April and June 2020, relied on three electronic databases: Web of Science, SCOPUS, and SCIELO. Given that the scholarly production regarding ageing is

not exclusive to any specific discipline, these databases were selected based on the quality of their dissemination and the wide scope of their academic production; furthermore, we selected journals whose main collections included indexes in Sciences, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities. Using these databases and relying on a register with previously defined search terms, we identified articles for 1975-2020. Following the method proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), each researcher conducted their work independently, so as to provide greater reliability.

The search descriptors used are summarized in table 1, using a variety of combinations.

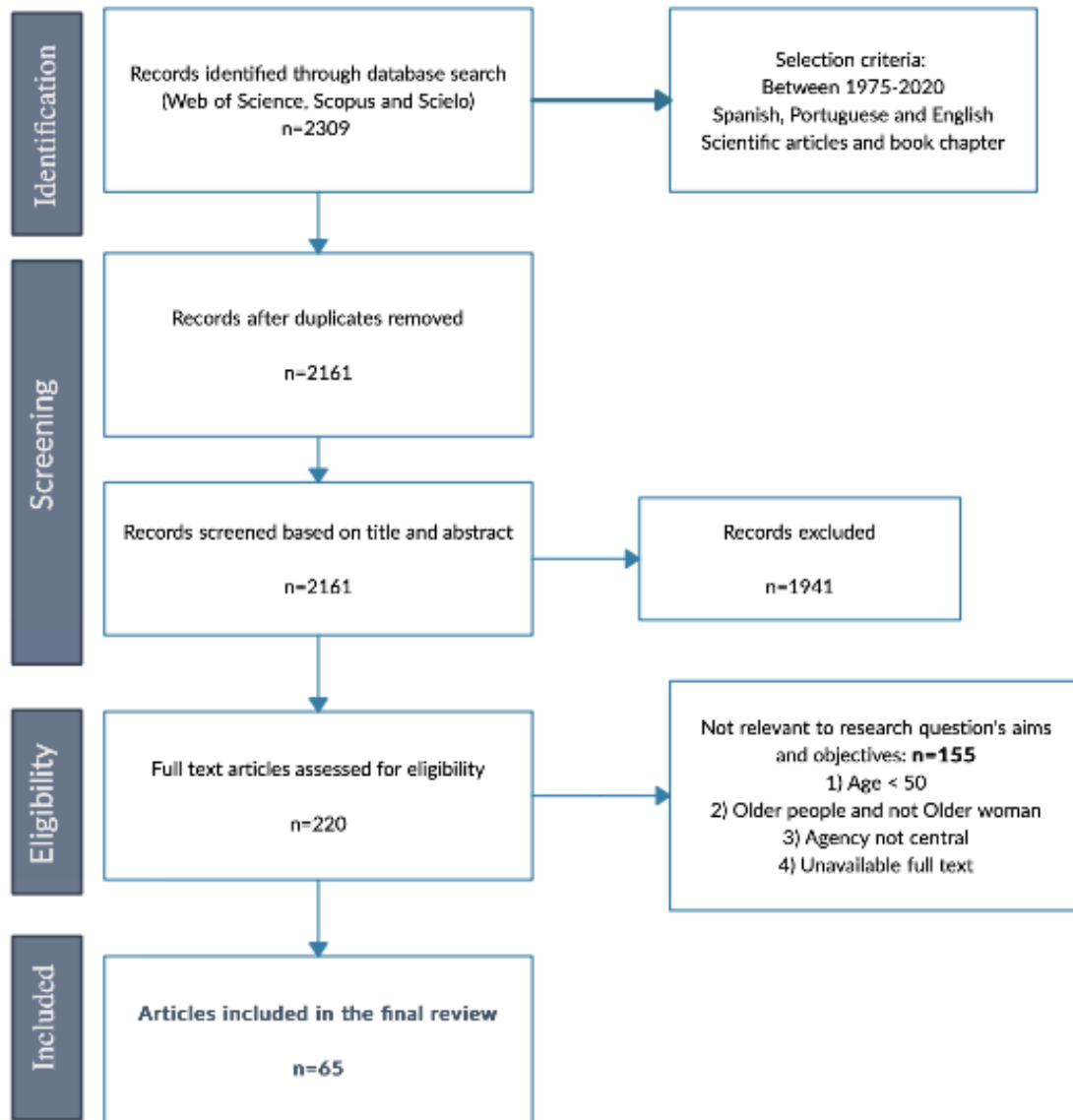
Table 1
Databases, Search Criteria, and Keywords

Databases	Search Criteria	Keywords
WOS	Search in: All databases Period: from 1975 to 2020 Search by topic: (TS) Domains (all) Type of document: article, review, book chapters Countries: all included Languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese	"Older woman" OR "elderly woman" OR "old* woman" OR "woman aging" OR "senior woman" OR "mujeres mayores" OR "viejass OR ancianas OR "mulheres idosas" OR idosos AND Empowerment OR agency OR "social participation" OR activism OR "political participation" OR "community participation" OR activismo OR agencia OR empowering OR "participación social" OR "participación política"
Scopus	Document Search: documents. In limit: Date range (inclusive) published 1975-2020 Subject area: all areas Country: all countries Language: English, Spanish, and Portuguese	Empowerment OR agency OR "social participation" OR activism OR "political participation" OR "community participation" OR activismo OR agencia OR empowering OR "participación social" OR "participación política" OR "participación comunitaria" OR agência OR atavism OR "participação da comunidade" OR "participação social" OR "participação política" OR fortalecimento
Scielo	Search in: all indexes. Countries Collection: all Magazines: all Language: Portuguese, English, and Spanish Search years: (inclusive) 1975-2020 Type of literature: article, review article	"Older woman*" OR "elderly woman*" OR "aging woman*" OR "mujer* mayor*" OR anciana* OR "mulheres idosas" OR idosos AND Agency OR activism OR empowerment OR "politic participation" OR "community participation" OR agencia OR activismo OR empowering OR agência OR atavism OR "participação da comunidade" OR "participação social" OR "participação política" OR fortalecimento

Stage 3: Study Selection

The search yielded 2,309 documents (figure 1 Study flow chart). After duplicate files were deleted, a final count of 2,161 records was reached. By examining titles, keywords, and abstracts from all documents, researchers selected a set of 220 articles for review. These were reviewed in detail afterwards, applying the inclusion criteria. Studies whose incorporation was doubtful were reviewed by a different researcher (Levac et al., 2010). Once this stage was completed, a total of 65 documents were included in the study (figure 1).

Figure 1
Flow chart for the scoping review process



Stage 4: Information Mapping

Key information was extracted from each of the selected documents (n=65). We developed a registration form to graph the information gathered in Microsoft Excel (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Besides bibliographical information, we considered the objectives, methodological design, and characteristics of the participants as outlined in the studies, as well as the scientific rigorousness concepts and criteria indicated in them (see Table 2 in appendix).

Stage 5: Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results

The study's last stage involved the mapping of the general characteristics of the 65 documents (data frequency analysis) and a subsequent analysis and synthesis using the thematic analysis technique (Levac et al., 2010). We conducted a qualitative thematic analysis, focusing on definitions, key themes and aspects of 'political agency'. This analysis allows researchers to systematically organize the information compiled,

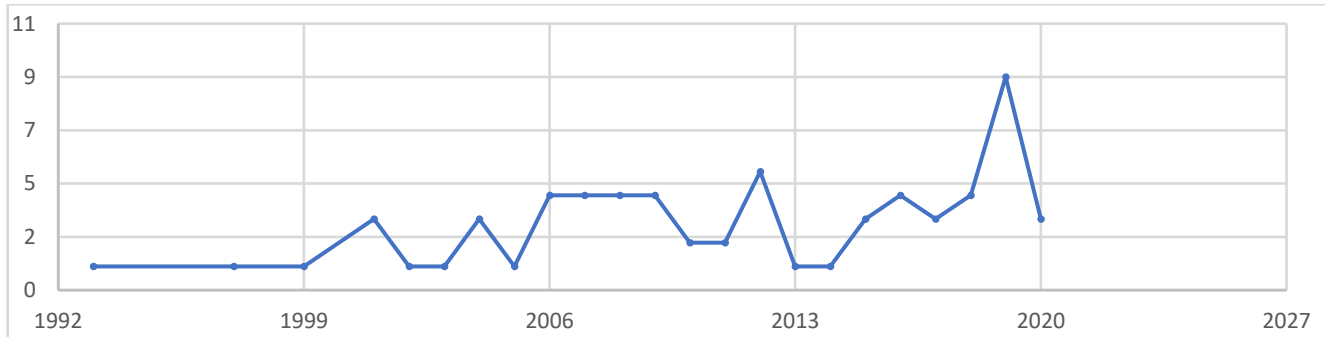
giving an account of how the data have been processed by the researchers, in order to understand what has been studied and used as evidence (Barrera et al., 2012).

An open axial coding method was used. The data from the articles were inductively coded in Excel. These documents were later classified using the previously identified themes and sub-themes, which were discussed according to their selection and order, inductively creating five main categories that will be further developed in the thematic analysis section (see Figure 3). The analysis resulted in an overview of study characteristics, as well as of the main findings and definitions of ‘political agency’ included in the literature examined. Again, two reviewers (authors NM and LH) independently summarized and reported all the results. The content of the analysis was then compared and adapted by consensus when needed.

Results

Although the literature search was conducted from 1975 onward, it is important to mention that all 65 articles selected for review were published between 1993 and 2020 (Figure 2 shows the articles distributed by year of publication). Furthermore, most of these articles are written in English (90.8 %), a few written in Spanish (6.2 %) and others in Portuguese (3.1 %).

Figure 2
Date of publication



Most studies employed a qualitative methodological approach, which was found in 49 documents, while 2 other articles used a mixed design and only 1 used a quantitative design. Table 3 presents the techniques employed.

Table 3
Information Gathering Techniques

Study Design	Interviews	Observation	Discussion group / Focus group	Workshops	Survey and questionnaires	Bibliographic review
Qualitative	28	9	11	1	2	4
Mixed methods	1	1	0	0	1	1
Quantitative	0	0	0	0	0	0

In general, the studies were concentrated in North America (38,4%), followed by Europe, (21,5%), and Oceania (9,23%). The description by publishing venue and country of origin can be seen in table 4. In 85% of cases, the site of publication and field work is the country of origin of the research, whereas in 15% of cases the country of origin of the study does not coincide with either the place of publication and/or the place of fieldwork, which is mainly focused on Asia and Africa.

Table 4
Distribution by Country

Country	N	%
United States	17	26 %
United Kingdom	13	20 %
Canada	11	17 %
Australia	7	11 %
Brazil	4	6 %
China	3	5 %
Spain	3	5 %
Chile	1	2 %
South Korea	1	2 %
The Netherlands	1	2 %
Ireland	1	2 %
Sri Lanka	1	2 %
More than one country	2	3 %
Total	65	100 %

The articles were published in interdisciplinary and disciplinary journals in the fields of Gerontology, Women's Studies, Social Work, Religion and Spirituality, Social Movements, Violence, Psychology, Sociology, Education and Gerontology, Geography, Employment, Body Studies, and Society.

The review also considered the authorship of the documents, something that is not generally highlighted in scoping reviews, paying particular attention to whether they were written exclusively by women, by men, or by mixed teams. A total of 53 articles were written by women, 9 articles by mixed teams, and 3 had no clear authorship. Gender was deduced from the authors' name, that from the western world are deemed as feminine or masculine. We assume that the only way to corroborate this information would be to ask the authors directly. We will present this point in the Discussion section.

Analysis

As mentioned above, five main themes were identified in the publications reviewed for this study. These themes describe the dimensions used to define and study the political agency of older women. They are composed of subthemes that will be addressed in the following sections of this article (Table 5).

Table 5
Summary of topics and subtopics included in the publications

Communities, Participation and Empowerment n = 16	Trajectories, Ordinariness, and Resistance n = 17	Agency and Cultural Diversity n = 11	Resisting Vulnerability n = 8	Older Women and Activism n = 13
Community engagement as a resource	Personal and Collective Passage into Old Age	Agency and Transmission of Knowledge	Negotiating and Resisting	Organization
Leisure as a Possibility for Empowerment	The Political in Domestic and Caretaking Work	Migration as a New Opportunity	Deconstructing the Frailty of Older Women	Adhering to Feminism

Communities, participation, and empowerment (n=16)

This category refers to the connection that older women have with their communities, revealing how through their collective experiences, they are able to exercise political agency. These experiences indicate women's commitment to community well-being and also describe leisure as a central dimension of their life projects, in addition to illustrating the ways in which they take control of their lives.

Community Engagement as a Resource

The studies analyze the experiences and practices of older women in their communities and offer evidence about how having community networks and bonds of trust can result in a better way of confronting the difficulties of growing old (Stevens, 2001). By involving themselves in volunteering community work, women improve their emotional well-being and their feelings of relevancy in their local spaces, in addition to how community exchange of health knowledge helps with fostering women's autonomy (Figueiredo et al., 2006). Such opportunities also contribute to the development of new skills and safe spaces (Maidment & MacFarlane, 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

Community organization and the opportunity of collectively addressing the experiences of old age, through the strengthening of respectful relationships, enables women to better resist the negative stereotypes associated with ageing (Rawsthorne et al., 2017). This continuous learning by women also defies discriminatory practices (Jackson, 2012). Engaging in intergenerational exchanges and sharing experiences with various age groups is enriching and offers mutual learning (Lin et al., 2019). Older women's adaptation to their community surroundings, plus the physical changes involved (livable spaces, urbanization, improvement of spaces), operate as a protecting factor. This allows women to respond when facing stressful situations by sharing their experiences with other community agents (Hand, 2020).

The articles examined show that the potential of community engagement for the development of older women's agency may be hindered by variables such as gender and socio-economic and educational levels (Ros-Sánchez & Lidón-Cerezuela, 2018). Overall, the articles stress the importance of up-to-date and relevant public policies directed at this demographic group, suggesting that these policies should incorporate a gendered approach and identify the contribution of older women in their communities and territories (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006).

These articles challenge negative stereotypes of older women by using their own experiences in community, paying special attention to the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into the public sphere. Nevertheless, this cannot be reduced to a universal and normative view of gender, presented as a homogeneous movement that leaves non-white and non-Western women out (Wray, 2007).

Leisure as a possibility for empowerment

Leisure is described as a central dimension in the life of older women, as it allows them to reassess and find value in their everyday practices by making use of personal time that might have been scarce in previous stages of their lives. Furthermore, authors note that leisure should not be reduced to a merely recreational activity (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007). Through leisure, older women may conform, resist, or empower themselves (Dionigi et al., 2011). Leisure activities also allow women to adapt to the changes that characterize their age and integrate these from a positive perspective (Sedgley et al., 2007).

Leisure is important because it enables women to review their lives, participate in society, and evaluate their satisfaction with their biographies. Through leisure activities, they can also resist traditional feminine identities and dominant discourses (Green, 1998). Leisure plays a very important role in subjective well-being and quality of life because it provides opportunities to meet life values and human necessities (Dionigi et al., 2011). When people participate in leisure activities, they develop and acquire additional skills and knowledge, build social relationships, and feel positive emotions, thus improving their quality of life (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011). Therefore, leisure can contribute positively to the agency of older women, insofar as it promotes their self-perception, coping, and empowerment in old age, as well as higher levels of well-being and health (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007).

Trajectories, ordinariness, and resistance (n=17)

This category highlights the life trajectories of older women in their everyday experiences and how they deploy strategies of resistance to subvert social mandates. By restoring the place of memory, the subjective processes and life stories of the participants, group support, domestic life, and everyday life are resignified as spheres of political action.

Personal and collective passage into old age

Studies show that older women problematize their life transitions and physical changes in ways that corroborate the social disapproval of their bodies and beauty stereotypes associated exclusively to the young. Their agency becomes a possibility for acceptance and reinvention in old age. It allows women to reclaim personal tools as well as therapeutic processes through which they can resignify their own experiences by sharing what they have in common with others (Reynolds et al., 2008; Winterich, 2007).

In her autobiographical research, Margaret Cruikshank (2008) approached her identity from the threshold of old age as a lesbian, middle-class woman, showing how these differential categories became spaces of resistance that enabled her to challenge traditional concepts of old age and gerontology.

Sexuality is another area covered in the articles, which is typically described as a complex experience in women's trajectories that can also be revised in adult life as part of innovating and resisting social mandates (Antoniassi et al., 2012). In Western countries, an ageing body and women's sexuality are rejected and stigmatized (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001). These studies offer hope, as they present other meanings built from women's experiences that break from the hegemonic construction of the body which excludes older women for not complying with mainstream beauty standards.

Moreover, within the framework of discrimination in women's occupational trajectories, some studies have focused on analyzing the ways of living and facing situations permeated by relationships of subordination and power (Lips & Hasting, 2012; Meliou et al., 2019; Pérez Salanova, 2008). In this respect, it is worth highlighting how important it is for older women to occupy positions of responsibility, as this enables them to operate in other political settings (Lips & Hasting, 2012; Pérez Salanova, 2008).

Spaces of mutual help and therapeutic experiences also enable women to resignify painful events, fulfilling their political agency. Furthermore, such spaces let women recognize the ways in which they have resisted gender mandates (Abeyasekera, 2017).

The political in domestic and caretaking work

Studies show that women continue performing caretaking work in old age. Their family contributions are recognized as a dimension of intergenerational transmission and legacy, motivated by their wish to convey spiritual, religious, and personal tools to their children and grandchildren (Afshar & Alikhan, 2002).

Women value caretaking work as an opportunity for offering life lessons to other generations—which cannot be attributed to formal instruction. In this respect, attitudes previously linked to the feminine such as being loving, empathetic, and supportive are re-signified now, not as intrinsically associated attributes to being a woman but, instead, as a means of connecting with loved ones. Thus, such features allow women to achieve greater intimacy and identify means of transcendence and leaving a mark (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017).

Life-sustaining everyday practices (e.g. cooking, shopping, managing the family budget) reveal the creativity and control that older women possess. Through these experiences, older women make decisions about their own lives and the lives of those around them, countering discourses that reduce the domestic to a patriarchal imposition and erasure by positioning them as passive receivers of societal norms (Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2009). Choi (2019), for example, proposes that older women in Hong Kong are capable of reorganizing their home and re-signifying relationships of power, thus, unfolding their agency and social commitment from their daily practices. Therefore, their political agency is not related to their intervention in the public space, but to their actions in the private space and through these, they question stereotypes and subvert relations of domination.

An example of the re-signification of domestic activities is presented in the ethnography of a sewing workshop in Santiago, Chile, by Herminia González, Sofia Larrazabal, and Menara Guizardi (2020). This study shows that the participating women have fun and share activities such as embroidery, knitting, and talking, all of which have a political meaning. It is through these everyday activities that these women recover their political agency, based on shared self-reflection and the creation of memories. Studies that tackle these topics enable the recognition of agency and resistance in women's personal experiences from an everyday and contextualized perspective (Hooks, 1990). In this way, these actions are not limited to the conventional reference points of empowerment in old age, constituting efforts that cannot be reduced to the small frame of institutional intervention (Wray, 2004).

Agency and cultural diversity (N=11)

Some of the articles reviewed approach older women's agency in direct relation to their personal migration experiences, highlighting the importance of certain ethnic and local particularities as well as the place of ancient wisdom.

Agency and transmission of knowledge

A part of the research reviewed covers female practices and knowledge in ancestral cultures or describes women's unconventional religious practices. According to these studies, the transmission of knowledge from older women to new generations emphasizes respect for nature and spirituality (Manning, 2010). Local healing practices reposition these women in a central role within their communities, acknowledging them as healers and caretakers, while also placing them in charge of health management in their communities (Aubel et al., 2001; Gaylord, 1999). Thus, older women are considered important religious-cultural figures in their social group, enjoying high status and social standing.

These studies remind us that, in order to grant visibility to older women's contributions, it is necessary to look into the practices, values, and beliefs found in each community. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish a dialogue between the medicinal practices of Western culture and the practices that are validated by local forms of knowledge, allowing their cultural references to be understood and valued, rather than dismissed as invalid (Yang, 2018). The agency of older women regarding the control and handling of health in their communities is precisely what facilitates the mediation and negotiation between local values and perspectives and the approach of Western medicine (Paiva et al., 2018).

Migration as a new opportunity

Studies describe older women's migration experience as a gamble they are willing to take to improve their living conditions. They establish that the reason for migration is not necessarily related to women's age, emphasizing that those who move at an older age also aspire to improve their life projects. However, the age at which they migrate may entail a greater physical and emotional effort as well as greater difficulties in exercising citizenship, given the barriers of the host country (Cook, 2010). In these contexts, older migrant women must deploy a range of practices to navigate language barriers and access security and protection services, to mention but a few of the situations that they face (Cook, 2010). Despite these

challenges, they manage to organize collectively, achieving greater visibility, which allows them to receive adequate support from State agents (Mjelde-Mossey & Walz, 2006; Wray, 2004). Migration, as these studies make clear, also contributes to self-affirmation, broadening women's capacities for decision-making, with researchers evaluating it as a possibility for the re-signification of life trajectories and as a way of granting relevance to old age in older women's closest local contexts (Lulle & King, 2016).

Finally, the studies also emphasize the need for an intersectional and feminist look at migration in order to approach the agency of older women. This perspective can help identify the full range of mechanisms of discrimination, establishing how they are articulated and expressed in older women, as this may intensify the inequalities that they face. In view of this, it is important to expand and strengthen public institutions as a means of facilitating the adaptation processes of older women, taking into account the various forms of discrimination that affect them as well as the diversity of old age experiences. This is conducive to valuing their trajectories rather than imposing specific ways of ageing (Charpentier & Quéniart, 2017).

Resisting vulnerability (n=8)

This category refers to older women's experiences from social exclusion to precariousness. It covers the social conditions that result in discrimination against them, showing the agency that they deploy to confront the situation.

Negotiating and resisting

The importance of women's psychological well-being is described in some of the articles, which emphasize the experiences of those who live in closed institutions (residencies or penitentiary facilities) where they conduct their everyday activities, facing routine and standardized processes that prevent them from making changes in their living situation. The articles also discuss how women with mobility difficulties or who experience a loss of autonomy may transition to increased levels of well-being when they make their own decisions and practice self-determination in relation to their needs and requirements (Lee & Benware, 1993). These women's capacities for negotiating with their peers as well as with officials in charge of institutions enable them to unfold their autonomy, acknowledge their agency, and resignify their fixed constructed identity, for example, "the old reclusive woman" (Wahidin & Tate, 2005). Everyday practices concerning food, time schedules, and leisure activities may involve the development of strategies of alliance, mediation, and rupture, which will allow them to increase their control over their lives.

Group living, exchanging collective experiences, and starting shared projects are also recognized as resistance practices. These spaces of participation allow women who show signs of cognitive decay to adopt innovative approaches that enable them to create in extreme routine contexts, build different or new communication strategies, and broaden the scope of action of a variety of interests (Baur & Abma, 2012; Lee & Benware, 1993).

The studies in this category invite us to reflect on how agency can be developed in old age by adopting an approach to ageing that overcomes the classic functional autonomy outlook (Subirats, 2018). Furthermore, these studies encourage us to regard as political values aspects that are commonly linked to the private sphere (e.g. relationships, affects, communication, caregiving) (Kirkwood, 2010).

Deconstructing the frailty of older women

The studies reviewed show that the construction of female old age is shifting: it is overcoming a narrow perspective centered on limitations and decay, and paying more attention to approaches that address the ways in which older women deal with violence and marginalization. For example, women respond to gender-based spousal violence through cognitive and emotional strategies that allow them to generate changes in their family roles, thus helping them to survive and reflect on their experiences (Zink et al., 2006). Jane Mears (2015) describes the potential of women to render visible the issue of domestic violence, positioning it as a structural problem rather than a family one. This allows women to address the issue from the vantage point of the networks of cooperation that they have built.

Other studies focus on the intersection between old age, gender, and poverty, exposing the categorization of women who live in poverty as a passive and vulnerable group, thus failing to acknowledge their capacity for agency (Jacka, 2014). For example, Durrenda Onolemhemen (2009) describes how women who have lived in marginalized situations have a high capacity for resilience, which should be further researched in

order to explore the specific modes of resilience in old age and to make visible the coping strategies that older women employ.

These studies suggest that older women are capable of adapting their roles to confront the problems that ail them. To do so, they transition through various spaces and institutions, for example, churches, community centers, or family networks, which can be considered as places where gender discrimination and inequality are reproduced, but which at the same time become escape routes for these women, as they can find shelter in them and dedicate their attention to themselves (Apesoa-Varano, 2019).

First, identifying political agency in these experiences allows us to engage in a careful evaluation of the depiction of elderly women as “passive victims” who are mere receivers of benefits. Second, this approach draws attention to the strategies employed in a variety of social spaces, which allow older women to improve their quality of life (Cañas, 2018).

Older women and activism (N=13)

Finally, a number of studies describe older women’s political activism, highlighting their potential for contributing to social change.

Organization

Some of the studies address the characteristics and objectives of older women’s activist organizations and identify a series of issues that mobilize them, including environmental rights, social justice, and racism. Some also question authoritarian and conservative political regimes, for example, the feminist protests of older women during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain (Valiente, 2015).

Some of these studies on women’s political practices and participation in social movements identify a set of older women’s representations which challenge negative stereotypes about old age (Ciafone, 2019), while other studies report changes in their negative and statist representations, a goal not initially pursued by women. These studies state that older women are able to reinvent their political activism by adapting their expressions, performance, and demands to the process of ageing and the changes experienced. For example, a study on Canada’s “raging grannies” shows that women’s identities and empowerment are collectively constituted by means of their activism, involving a continuing process of participation, self-realization, and sociopolitical liberation. Thus, particular identities are built by promoting public and social visibility in a way that questions stereotypes and roles attributed to women which are associated with old age (Narushima, 2004).

Along these lines, these women’s practices are developed in various contexts, including digital platforms, local solidarity acts, demonstrations, and media interventions. These activist practices highlight women’s strategic mindset to build alliances and collaborate with other relevant actors relying on resources that they have mastered over time (Chazan, 2016). Elderly women devote a large amount of their time to organization practices, considering that they energize them while also bringing a sense of projection, belonging, and social commitment. Said studies examine women’s experiences and their actions, which are never constructed upon the basis of masculine logics commonly associated with mainstream political life (Kirkwood, 2010). Rather, older women’s efforts contribute to generating local support and affective practices that mobilize other paths of action (Wray, 2004).

Adhering to feminism

Unlike the studies previously discussed, these articles address older women’s explicit support of feminism. Following this specific approach allows authors to offer a critical reading of older women’s feminist activist practices and their trajectories of social and political participation. For example, an American study on the experience of “second wave” feminist activists shows how, in their old age, women give new meanings to the victories and defeats of the feminist struggle. They tend to highlight the value of the affective dimension of their political activism, including feelings of pride and disappointment for their achievements and frustrations, especially in the context of their current demands (Foster, 2015). In this regard, in a Canadian study, Charperntier, Queniart, and Jacques (2008) identify the interests that motivate older women to get involved in social activities and political activism. This study makes visible areas of participation beyond those commonly associated with the collectives of older adults, such as their interest in

social justice, climate change, human rights, and poverty. Also, this study reveals how their political participation as women allows them to make this compatible with other spheres of their everyday life.

These studies that address older women's feminist activism suggest that those who identify as feminists have experienced diverse forms of gender discrimination. As they have grown older, feminism has enabled them to integrate personal and collective resources to face gender discrimination. One of the studies illustrates an 80-year-old grassroots peace activist story, describing how she values spirituality. The authors also explore its role in women's self-understanding of their life trajectories, the quest for inner peace and spirituality motivating and sustaining community activism (Bradley et al., 2007). Thus, the study underscores that grassroots peace activism and spirituality constitute a lifelong process.

Some older women's activism scholars share the view that older women's activism challenges discriminatory stereotypes found in political, sexist, and patriarchal contexts, questioning the representations that characterize them as fragile, dependent, and disconnected from larger societal processes (Charperntier et al., 2008; McHugh, 2012). They also emphasize that the older women's activism fosters bonds of reciprocity and solidarity that help build political alliances in organizations, as well as supportive relationships and a shared sense of belonging (Chazan, 2019).

Discussion

This study explored the knowledge produced between 1975 and 2020 about female old age and political agency. Although research on old age begins to increase in the 1970s, we observed that older women were not likely to be considered subjects of study until the 1990s, a time when interest in the study of the relationship between gender and age intensified (González & Lube, 2020). Nancy Datan (1989) claimed that older women were a "silent majority" on the way to becoming a "social problem" and called for the development of critical perspectives that would explore female old age, considering its inequities and potentials. The results of our review show the appearance of the first article in 1993, with most other articles being published only from 2006 onward. This may be explained by the so-called "critical turn" that occurred in social gerontology when age was added to the debate as a structuring factor of inequalities (González & Lube, 2020). This turn focused on showing not only gender differences in old age, but also racial differences (Stone, 1989). In the same way, theoretical debates constructed by black feminist, poststructuralist, decolonial, and post-colonial movements have become more popular and, likewise, enriched a contextually and historically situated notion of gender, entangled with such aspects as ethnicity, race, age, country of origin, and class. These intersectional studies contributed to the construction of new epistemologies and more complex research paradigms, allowing for more in-depth research on how the multiple mechanisms of social exclusion flow and articulate in a particular way in women's old age (Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2004; Brah, 2011). Finally, the growth of a Latin American feminist perspective on ageing brought to the fore the importance of the local context and the close relationship between care and transformations in women's life (González & Lube, 2020b). We believe that these particular contributions helped recognize the agency of older women and the various practices through which they face ageing.

At first, we delved into a set of studies which addressed older women's political agency and resistance practices as strained homogeneous categories linked to frailty in old age and vindicated their knowledge and everyday practices as political spaces. Then, our research topic focused on recognizing that older women's agency needs to take women's own cultural references into consideration, directly questioning Western standards defining old age. Lastly, the results of our research examined a small and emerging field of studies centered on activist ageing and older women as challenging public spaces and traditional contexts of political agency. It suggests that older women's meanings and modes of participation are likely to expand conventional notions of activism, which are socially reduced to experiences linked to youth (Richards, 2012). In fact, these participation forms can be considered as strategies of resistance against the very changes and/or difficulties that old age women face (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019).

At the same time, it is important to recognize that meanings and modes of participation inevitably vary in relation to the specificities of time, space, and cultural context (Wray, 2003b). Nevertheless, we observed that the study of agency, in general, has been reduced to conceptualizations that converge with the experiences of Western women, ignoring the diverse ethnic and cultural settings in which women grow old. Consequently, there has been a tendency to reinforce a hegemonic and dominant construction of old age, excluding expressions of agency that do grant space for the diversity of such experiences (Wray, 2003b).

This conceptual universalization reflects a conception of agency that is strongly linked to expressions of individual autonomy and success, centered on an individual's self-sufficiency that takes no interest in associative group processes (Kirkwood, 2010; Wray, 2007). This conception of agency has had a clear impact on the definition of political agency—typically understood using masculinizing registers and weighing their impact at a social level. Thus, the domestic and daily life in which women's political agency is deployed is rendered invisible; likewise, their conception of personal life as a political realm goes ignored (Hooks, 1990).

The aforementioned evidence suggests that older women exert their resistance in a complex manner, as they subvert the dominant notions of active ageing and the gender and age prescriptions imposed on them both socially and historically (Chazan & Kittmer, 2016; Grenier & Hanley, 2007). In other words, this suggests that older women's political agency must be analyzed in terms of driving positive and significant changes in the experiences of those who are immersed in specific historical and social contexts, while simultaneously examining the self-construction that they unfold (Cañas, 2018). For example, older women have faced multiple discrimination instances, which have accumulated throughout their lives. Therefore, agency and its expressions must also be understood according to the structural conditions, positions, and power relationships in which these women operate (Wray, 2004, 2007). In this regard, the studies analyzed in our review offer evidence that political agency is exerted even in contexts of social inequality, violence, and subordination. In fact, political agency can also be expressed by women who show signs of decay or frailty in their old age, thus contravening the conventional perspectives that associate certain indicators with a successful old age. In this vein, women's political resistance emerges primarily from the mobilization of vulnerability (Butler, 2006).

In this review, we also found studies that showed that political agency is expressed in interdependent projects, or women's collectives, more so than in individual and independent experiences (Kirkwood, 2010; Wray, 2003a). This suggests that older women, their actions, and their structures cannot be understood outside the margins of community and social relationships. This notion must necessarily extend the debate beyond the effects of an action, prompting us to develop a concept of agency as articulation (Ema, 2003). Therefore, the results of this review coincide with the perspectives that recognize agency processes as a set of intertwined relationships that are, therefore, (re)produced at a community and local level.

Finally, in our review, we observed that 90 percent of the studies on women's ageing were conducted by women. This is an interesting finding as the construction of the object of study and the phenomenon being researched could be linked to the researchers' experiences in the process of ageing. However, this background could also suggest that knowledge about and produced by women is still marginal and disposable, according to the dominant notions of what constitutes relevant "knowledge" in the modern sciences. If so, it demonstrates the persistent indifference that androcentric science shows towards women's issues and concerns (Lugones, 2008). Anibal Quijano (2000) has referred to the pattern of domination embedded in modern capitalist societies as a product of their colonial heritage, which imposes a certain way of understanding the world (Eurocentric) that denies and delegitimizes the production of knowledge of a different nature (e.g., subordinate, indigenous, feminist, Latin American).

Although, in recent decades, feminist scholarship has tried to overcome the hegemony of mainstream colonial knowledge within the social sciences, it could be falling into a narrowly academic discourse that is complicit with a global capitalism that erases differences and that is unconcerned with the mechanisms of exclusion and production of social marginalization (Castro-Gómez, 2000). Likewise, the political agency of older women continues to be regarded as secondary in the gerontological field, with its social visibility only being claimed by women researchers who have brought these issues into the debate. In this context, we must ask ourselves, how do the new paradigms of knowledge production perpetuate the mechanisms of exclusion and invisibility around gender and the differential aspects of women's ageing?

Lastly, it is necessary to discuss the limitations of our study. Despite the contributions that we intended to make, some challenges faced during the review process should be noted. For instance, the data set may have excluded some articles given the search terms used and the exclusion or inclusion criteria adopted. More specifically, our review was limited to three languages and only three databases. In this respect, most of the research examined was conducted in North America, and to a lesser extent in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This relevant finding suggests that there is a concentration of scientific production on older women and political agency in countries of the global North. It can also be presumed that the knowledge produced

in that region is vastly over-represented and thus prioritized, even though it may not coincide with certain experiences of female ageing, which differ across contexts and territories. Consequently, this may lead to the reproduction and generalization of certain ways of ageing and the erasure of others.

Considering the limitations and challenges of this review, we encourage researchers to explore the older women's political agency in a variety of contexts, thus broadening their search to encompass the variables involved in the trajectories of ageing and agency in a more complex manner. This should incorporate a reading of ageing as a situated experience (Haraway, 1995). In this regard, we suggest a decolonization of knowledge (Castro-Gómez, 2000) that may allow us to broaden the universal hegemonic thinking on ageing, with its binary categorization of old age (productive-unproductive, passive-active, healthy-sick), and to explore the specificities and experiences of ageing in other cultural contexts. We propose the need to overcome a dichotomous categorization of gender (masculine/feminine)—which underlies the studies reviewed—as a way to finally recognize the multiple female identities that are not captured by binary conceptions. Taking into consideration the former, feminist scholarship considers the study of intersectionality a crucial analytical tool to comprehend the sociopolitical processes and practices that older women partake in. Its importance lies in the ability to articulate differentiated axes such as gender, age, social class, race, and others simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989), enabling the visualization of how agency and resistance may arise from the circumstances of inequality and oppression affecting women (Brah, 2011). Lastly, we must stress the importance of using data collection methodologies and techniques that include older women's discourses and actions instead of excluding them from research (Montero, 2010). The goal of this approach is to underline the knowledge about politicized and emancipatory practices that help with the development of older women across territories and in diverse contexts (Mazzucchelli, Reyes-Espejo & Íñiguez-Rueda, 2021; Ibáñez, 2001).

In conclusion, this scoping review has proven to be useful in identifying important topics in the literature on older women and political agency, expanding existing notions found in the gerontological field while also challenging conventional perspectives found in mainstream scientific literature. Our review showed that the political agency of older women is being carried out in various ways and in multiple places: community participation and empowerment, life trajectories and ageing, cultural and ethnic diversity, resistance against situations of social exclusion and marginalization, and activism and political participation.

In this context, we observe that studies on older women are enriched by integrating the contributions of feminism and critical social psychology. Feminist approaches have recognized that most practices in which women engage unfold in domestic-private spaces, which have the potential of reproducing or subverting existing structures. Critical social psychology and feminist epistemologies put the empiricist and androcentric tradition of science under tension and introduce situated perspectives, which articulate positions and relations, taking into account the social and historical location of the knowledge produced. These approaches are in line with the findings of this review, which emphasize the need to explore how older women execute their political agency, paying attention to the situated and contextual character of their ageing experiences. A better understanding of these issues will shed light on how to support the ageing process while also helping to determine which dimensions may contribute to the health and wellness of older women. In this regard, critical social psychology has contributed to the integration of excluded actors (such as older women) into the public debate in a respectful, reflexive, and participatory manner, promoting a common language among politicians, professionals, and the actors and communities themselves (Montero, 2010). We conclude, therefore, that these studies represent a crucial contribution to the gerontological field—and to public actions on behalf of ageing populations more generally—because they underline the specificity and diversity of older women's experiences, making their acts of resistance visible and, thus, highlighting their importance as subjects within their communities and territories.

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Appendix

Table 2
Characteristics of Included Articles (n = 65)

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Lee, J. & Benware, M.	1993	The empowerment of women residents in the nursing home	To divulge the results of a project that intended to empower women living in retirement homes.	Workshops with women	N= unspecified Age range 60 - 100
Ward, C. & Ploeg, J.	1997	A feminist approach to health promotion for older women	To use a feminist analysis to criticize the promotion of health, identifying gender, class, race, and age biases that influence elderly women's health and to suggest changes in the theory of health promotion, research, practice and education.	Bibliographic review	Not applicable
S. Gaylord	1999	Alternative therapies and empowerment of older women	To explore the reasons for the increase of popularity in alternative therapies and the way they could improve the well-being of people from a feminist perspective of empowering.	Theoretical essay	Not applicable
Aubel, J., Toure, I., Diagne, M., Lazin, K., Sène, E.H., Faye, Y., & Tandia, M	2001	Strengthening grandmother networks to improve community nutrition: Experience from Senegal	To report the findings of a nutritional educational project with networks of grandmothers in Senegal, and to account for their empowering, leadership, and influence in the nutritional practices of other generations.	Non-formal education methodology, using songs, open-ended stories, and group discussion	N= unspecified Grandmother and community leaders
Maguire, M.	2001	Beating time? The resistance, reproduction and representation of older women in teacher education (UK)	To explore some of the dilemmas that shape and model the working world of these women, specifically regarding their age and discrimination issues due to age.	Qualitative, in-depth interviews	N= 7 Education professionals Age range 47 - 59
Stevens, N.	2001	Assisting older women in combating ageist stereotypes and improving attitudes toward aging	To present results following elderly women who participated in an educational program about enriching friendship for women in the Netherlands.	Empirical article based in the evaluation of an intervention with elderly women	N= 40 Age range 54 - 83
Afshar, H & Alikhan, F.	2002	Age and empowerment amongst slum dwelling women in Hyderabad	To offer an understanding of empowering in terms of the experiences of a group of elderly women living in marginalized neighborhoods in Hyderabad.	Qualitative. Through focus groups, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews	N= unspecified Elderly women from India

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Wray, S.	2003	Women growing older: Agency, ethnicity and culture	This article considers the extent to which gerontological theories, which highlight the problems associated with later life, reflect the experiences of older women across ethnic and cultural differences.	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus groups	N= 170 Age range 60 – 80. British women from different ethnic groups.
Wray, S.	2004	What constitutes agency and empowerment for women in later life?	To examine and reflect upon the meanings that elderly women from different ethnic origins grant to agency and empowering in later life (adulthood).	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus groups	N=170 Age range 60 – 80. British women from different ethnic groups.
Narushima, M.	2004	A gaggle of raging grannies: The empowerment of older Canadian women through social activism	To explore a particular expression of social activism in elderly Canadian women, considering their implications and learning in later life.	Qualitative. Case study. Document analysis, interviews, and participant observation.	N=15 Age range 50 - 70 Members of Raging Grannies.
Hockey, J., Meah, A., & Robinson, V.	2004	A heterosexual life: Older women and agency within marriage and the family	To explore and divulge, through a focus in the life trajectory of the life of Jean, identifying acts of resistance in her heterosexual life.	Qualitative. Case study	N=1 80 years
Wahidin, A. & Tate, S.	2005	Prison (E)scapes and body tropes: Older women in the prison time machine	To explore the way in which imprisoned elderly women negotiate the “prisoner” identity in the discipline and time of confinement.	Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews	N= unspecified Age range 50 - 73
Zink, T., Jacobson Jr, C. J., Pabst, S., Regan, S., & Fisher, B. S.	2006	A lifetime of intimate partner violence: Coping strategies of older women	To get to know strategies that elderly women develop to face intimate abuse in long-term relationships.	Qualitative. Analysis from substantiated theory	N= 38 Older than 55 y.o.
Warburton, J. & McLaughlin, D.	2006	Doing it from your heart: The role of older women as informal volunteers	To explore the experiences lived by women regarding their role as informal volunteers, using role identity theory as a framework.	Empirical article. Focus group methodology	N=125 Age range 55 - 93
Mjelde-Mossey, L. & Walz, E.	2006	Changing cultural and social environments: Implications for older East Asian women	To explore the changes on ageing in the social and cultural traditions of eastern Asia and their implications for women who grow old in those cultures.	Unspecified	N= unspecified

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Figueiredo, M., Monteiro, C., Nunes, B. & Maria, M.L.	2006	Educação em saúde e mulheres idosas: promoção de conquistas políticas, sociais e em saúde	To delve into the practices and knowledge of elderly women regarding citizenship autonomy, resulting from the action and intervention of the Education for Health.	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews.	N= 10
Bradley, C., Maschi, T., & Gilmore, K.	2007	One woman's life journey: A case study of spirituality and activism	The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of an 80-year-old woman grassroots activist who remains involved in the quest for peace.	Qualitative Case study	N= 1 80 years Peace activist
Sedgley, D., Morgan, N., & Pritchard, A.	2007	Insights into older women's leisure: Voices from urban South Wales	The article presents findings on the importance and meaning of leisure in a group of women over 75 years old.	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	N= 12 >75 years
Hutchinson, S. & Wexler, B.	2007	Is "raging" good for health? Older women's participation in the Raging Grannies.	The article studies the meanings and benefits associated to health of elderly women who participate in Raging Grannies.	Qualitative Interviews and focus groups.	N=11 Age range 60 – 70
Winterich, J.	2007	Aging, femininity, and the body: What appearance changes mean to women with age	To reveal the findings of research in order to understand how elderly women experience the signs of ageing.	Qualitative. Interviews	N= 30 Age range 47 - 71
Reynolds, F., Lim, K. & Prior, S.	2008	Narratives of therapeutic art-making in the context of marital breakdown: Older women reflect on a significant mid-life experience.	This article explores the narratives about depression and marriage crisis in elderly women, through the experience of therapeutic art.	Qualitative Narrative focus	N=3 Age range 65 - 75
Charpentier, M., Queniat, A. & Jacques, J.	2008	Activism among older women in Quebec, Canada: Changing the world after age 65	To examine the participation experience of high-level women in Quebec, Canada.	Qualitative. Life story. Substantiated theory.	N= 24 Age range 65 - 87

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	N° and characteristics of participants
Cruikshank, M.	2008	Aging and identity politics	To reflect on the multiple interconnected identities—women, lesbian, elder—in different stages of life.	Autobiographical essay.	N= 1
Pérez Salanova, M.	2008	Acción, participación y prácticas sociales: Un estudio psicosocial de mujeres mayores que ocupan posiciones formales de poder	To present the results of a study on the social practices of elderly women who occupy places of responsibility in various associations.	Qualitative. Discussion groups and in-depth interviews. Discourse analysis	N=50 Age range 60 - 85
Onolemhe, D.	2009	Meeting the challenges of urban aging: Narratives of poor elderly women of Detroit, Michigan	This phenomenological study delves into poor urban women living in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan from the perspective of strength.	Qualitative - Phenomenological Interviews	N=15 >60 years Socioeconomic profile below the poverty line.
Sawchuk, D.	2009	The Raging Grannies: Defying stereotypes and embracing aging through activism	This study explores Raging Grannies activism and the strategic adoption of the grandmother.	Qualitative Participant observation	N=15 Age range 45 - 81
Neysmith, S.M. & Reitsma-Street, M.	2009	The provisioning responsibilities of older women	To present data on the work of supplying and caring for elderly women and their social contribution.	Qualitative - interviews	N= 29 Age range 69 - 85
Maidment, J. & MacFarlane, S.	2009	Craft groups: Sites of friendship, empowerment, belonging and learning for older women	To inform about a qualitative research project conducted in Victoria, Australia with nine elderly women, accounting for their experience and participation in groups of artisans and, specifically, the impact of this participation on their sense of well-being.	Empirical Article	N= 9
Cook, J.	2010	Exploring older women's citizenship: Understanding the impact of migration in later life	This paper focuses upon the welfare citizenship experiences of older women who migrated to England in later life, either as refugees or as post-retirement migrants.	Qualitative. Interviews and life stories Focus groups by ethnic group	N=47 Migrant elderly women
Manning, L.	2010	An exploration of Paganism: Aging women embracing the divine feminine	To explore how a specific spiritual orientation shapes the social meaning and process of ageing of women.	Qualitative. Exploratory study with interviews. Analysis through substantiated theory and feminist perspective	N= 8 Pagan elderly women

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Dionigi, R. A., Horton, S., & Bellamy, J.	2011	Meanings of Aging Among Older Canadian Women of Varying Physical Activity Levels	This study examines how older women's meanings of successful aging differ depending on their attitudes towards old age and current leisure practices.	Qualitative. In-depth interviews Biographical, biomedical and psychosocial approach	N= 21 Age range 75 – 92.
Maidment, J. & MacFarlane, S.	2011	Crafting communities: Promoting inclusion, empowerment, and learning between older women	To account for a research project conducted in Victoria, Australia during 2007-2008 in groups of women dedicated to artisan crafts and who participate in community work.	Qualitative. Individual and group interviews	N= 83
Baur, V. & Abma, T.	2012	The Taste Buddies: Participation and empowerment in a residential home for older people	In this article we describe how a group of seven residents (all female), calling themselves The Taste Buddies, developed a joint vision on how meals could be improved.	Qualitative. Action research	N=7 Age range 82 - 92 Women with disabilities or an underlying chronic condition.
Jackson, S.	2012	'Lost ladies': Lifelong learning and community participation for older women.	To explore the permanent learning and the community participation of elderly women in the National Federation of Women's Institutes in England and Wales in the UK, as well as in Sydney Older Women's Network in Australia.	Qualitative. Comparative study. Bibliographical reviews, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and participant observation	N= unspecified >50 years
McHugh, M.	2012	Aging, agency, and activism: Older women as social change agents	To offer recommendations for organizations that aim to recruit and involve elderly women as members, from a feminist perspective.	Bibliographic review	N= unspecified >50-year activists
Lips, H. & Hastings, S.	2012	Competing discourses for older women: Agency/leadership vs. disengagement/retirement	To account for a bibliographic review centered around elderly women and their development in dichotomies such as employment/retirement, physical activity/ inactivity, etc.	Bibliographic review	N= unspecified
Antoniassi, V., Villela, S. & Komura, L.	2012	Improvement of older women's sexuality through emancipatory education	To explore the ways in which sexuality is experienced by elderly women in everyday life, and how their development can be improved.	Qualitative. Research-action	N=6 Women from a rural area in Southwest Brazil

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Quéniart, A. & Charpentier, M.	2013	Initiate, bequeath, and remember: Older women's transmission role within the family	The article explores the place of women in family and the public sphere, through the meanings that women grant to their legacy, their children and grandchildren as a female transmission, and their importance within their families.	Qualitative In-depth interviews	N= 25 Age range 65 - 98 Women from 3 generations
Jacka, T.	2014	Left-behind and vulnerable? Conceptualizing development and older women's agency in rural China	The paper focuses on the agency of left-behind women between ages 50 - 80. It aims, first of all, to point out the way toward an empirically richer understanding of the social construction of older women's agency and well-being. The second aim of the paper is to suggest how different conceptualizations of "agency" and "older women" might contribute to more ethical and politically effective strategies for the development and the improvement of women's well-being.	Mixed design Article based in case story N= 1	Rural area inhabitants. 63 years
Foster, J.E.	2015	Women of a certain age: "Second wave" feminists reflect back on 50 years of struggle in the United States.	This study explores the lives of 31 women in the U.S. who were "second wave" feminist activists in order to understand how aging activists currently make sense of victories and setbacks in the struggle for gender justice.	Qualitative In-depth interviews	N=31
Mears, J.	2015	Violence Against Older Women: Activism, Social Justice, and Social Change	An overview of the major achievements of the OWN Working Party, including a meta-analysis of three research projects with their findings, recommendations, and outcomes.	Qualitative article analyzing three research projects.	N= unspecified
Valiente, C.	2015	Age and Feminist Activism: The Feminist Protest Within the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain	To examine the existence of a positive relationship between age and feminist activist analyzing the empirical case of the feminist protests within the Catholic Church in Franco's Spain.	Qualitative.	N= unspecified
Chazan, M.	2016	Settler solidarities as praxis: Understanding 'granny activism' beyond the highly-visible	This paper examines why and how Raging Grannies are building alliances with Indigenous movements in Canada.	Qualitative. Focus groups, interviews and observation	N=14 women Age range 60-70
Lulle, A. & King, R.	2016	Ageing well: The time-spaces of possibility for older female Latvian migrants in the UK.	To explore the relationships between ageing, location and immigration, based in the life story interviews with 37 Latvian immigrant women in the United Kingdom.	Qualitative. Life stories and interviews	N=37 >50 years, Latvian immigrants in the United Kingdom

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Dougherty, E. N., Dorr, N., & Pulice, R. T.	2016	Assisting older women in combatting ageist stereotypes and improving attitudes toward aging.	To review older women's common stereotypes and discuss their omnipresence. To explore the effect of these ageist stereotypes on older women, with especial emphasis on stereotype threat and self-stereotyping concepts.	Bibliographic review	N= unspecified
M. Charpentier, A. Quéniart	2016	Aging experiences of older immigrant women in Québec (Canada): From deskilling to liberation	This article examines older immigrant women's experiences of aging. The data are based on qualitative research that was conducted in Québec, Canada with 83 elderly women from different ethnocultural backgrounds.	Qualitative	N= 83 Elderly women from different ethnocultural backgrounds
Antosik-Parsons, K.	2017	The visibility of women's ageing and agency in Suzanne Lacy's The Crystal Quilt (1987) and Silver Action (2013)	This chapter examines two major participatory works, The Crystal Quilt (1987) and the more recent Silver Action (2013), as they relate to women's ageing and agency. Each is unique and distinctive in its aims, framing, location and execution.	Analysis of the artist's work	N= not applicable
Abeyasekera, A.	2017	"Living for others": Narrating agency in the context of failed marriages and singleness in urban Sri Lanka	To describe how women from previous generations narrate their life stories by using cultural repertoires.	Qualitative. Ethnographic. Case study	N=2 Age range 73 – 58
Rawsthorne, M., Ellis, K., & de Pree, A.	2017	"Working with COW": Social Work Supporting Older Women Living in the Community	To explore the potential of social work from the principles of community development in order to allow for socially disfavored elderly women to live in vibrant and solidarity-based communities, in which they will feel safe and can access to the support services they need.	Qualitative, community-based design	N= unspecified >55 years
Ros-Sánchez, T. & Lidón-Cerezuela, B.	2018	La experiencia del empoderamiento en mujeres mayores de 65 años. Estudio cualitativo	To understand the experience of empowering of a group of elderly women.	Qualitative Phenomenological	N=5 >65 years
Paiva Dias-Scopel, R., & Scopel, D.	2018	¿Quiénes son las parteras munduruku? Pluralismo médico y autoatención en el parto domiciliario entre indígenas en Amazonas, Brasil.	To understand who the Munduruku midwives are from an ethnographic perspective, describing care and self-care practices during pregnancy and labor amongst the Munduruku.	Qualitative. Ethnographic. Participant observation	N= unspecified
Satybaldieva, E.	2018	A mob for hire? Unpacking older women's political activism in Kyrgyzstan	To understand the nature of elderly women's political activism in a patriarchal, sexist, and neoliberal context, which compromises equality of participation in politics.	Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews	N= unspecified Age range 55 - 65

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Yang, Y.	2018	Aging in community and local NGOs: Empowering marginalized older women in South Korea	To report the results of a research based on integrated case studies of elderly people selected from self-help groups in urban zones of South Korea, whose objective is to help the elderly who lived in the community, particularly poor, marginalized women, to grow old in their community and to remain active and contributing members.	Qualitative Case study	N= unspecified
Apesoa-Varano, E.	2019	From shame to dignity: Elderly women, depression, and the feminine self	This analysis is based on 45 interviews with primarily working-class depressed elderly women who were recruited in primary care clinics in northern central California.	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	N=45 Age range 65 - 80 Working class women diagnosed with depression
Choi, K.	2019	Home and the materialization of the divergent subjectivities of older women in Hong Kong	Employing an agential realist approach to analyze the homes and discursive-materialist practices of three older women, this paper explores how the entanglement of materialities, discourses, and subjectivities at home as a site of cultural action contributes to the ongoing enactment of divergent subjectivities of older Hong Kong women.	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews, observation and photographs	N= 3
Zhang, J.	2019	How community participation promotes the relocation adjustment of older women: A moderated mediation analysis	The purpose of this study is to examine the role of community participation in older women's relocation adjustment and to further examine the moderated mediation mechanism with a sense of community as a mediator and personal resilience as a moderator.	Quantitative design. Cross-sectional design	N= 205 Age range 50 - 88 relocated in urban environments
Larri, L., & Whitehouse, H.	2019	Nannagogy: Social movement learning for older women's activism in the gas fields in Australia	In this paper, the authors explore the concept of Nannagogy, an innovative pedagogy of informal adult learning enacted by the activist 'disorganization', the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed (KNAGs).	Mixed design Descriptive case study Polls, interviews, observation, documents	N= unspecified Nannas collective, Australia.
Ciafone, A.	2019	The Gray Panthers are watching: Gray women's media activism in the 1970s and 80s	To account for the trajectory of the Gray Panthers, their influence in the media and their disruption of ageist discourses.	Documentary study Television programs and interviews (archive)	N= not applicable

Literat, I. & Markus, S.	2019	'Crafting a way forward': Online participation, craftivism and civic engagement in Ravelry's Pussyhat Project group	To facilitate an understanding of the emerging practices of civic expression and participation, and the ways in which online participation can reflect and support these practices.	Qualitative. Ethnographic, virtual ethnography, observation.	N= unspecified Ravelry website, Pussyhat Project group (4551 members)
Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Study design and methodological strategies	No. and characteristics of participants
Meliou, E., Mallett, O., & Rosenberg, S	2019	Being a self-employed older woman: From discrimination to activism	This study seeks to reflect on the activist work of Shoshanna Rosenberg, as it is constructed through the creation of a social enterprise to support the elderly.	Autobiographical study	N= 1 50 years
Chazan, M.	2019	Black South African women on excursions: A reflection on the quality of township life for seniors	Article that presents the results of a research conducted between 2006 and 2016.	Qualitative, longitudinal research.	N= unspecified Age range 68 - 83
M.Lin, J. Bao, E. Dong	2019	Dancing in public spaces: an exploratory study on China's Grooving Grannies	To explore the spatial practice of elderly women who participate in Guangchangwu (GGW) in the city of Guangzhou.	Qualitative. Non-participant observations and in-depth interviews	N=40
H.González, S.Larrázabal, M.Guizardi	2020	Negotiating distinctions: An ethnography on gender and care in an embroidery workshop for elderly ladies in Providencia (Chile)	The objective was to understand how old age is experienced by women who belong to upper and middle classes, and which community, personal and family strategies these women developed to face the challenges and opportunities of ageing.	Qualitative Ethnography Interviews, observations	N= 20 Age range 60 - 91
R. Borges, C. Brito, C. Monteiro	2020	Saúde, lazer e envelhecimento: uma análise sobre a brincadeira de dança de roda das Meninas de Sinhá	An examination on the attribution of meaning that a group of elderly women, <i>Meninas de Sinhá</i> , grant to the power of the circle dance, both in leisure and in healing.	Qualitative Documentary analysis of previous productions about the group (videos, photographs, theses, songs)	N= average of 22 women Age range 57 - 99
Hand, C	2020	Older women's engagement in community occupations: Considerations of lifespan and place	To explore older Canadian women's engagement in community occupations as it occurs over the lifespan and in context.	Qualitative, Narrative interviews, ethnographic following interviews	N=3 Age range 74 -84 (previous research)

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