



5-2015

Careers in Aging: Increasing Interest and Investigating Career Paths

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CAREERS IN AGING: INCREASING INTEREST AND INVESTIGATING CAREER PATHS

Paul Cunnington, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2015

This qualitative study explored the perspective of young professionals on how to increase interest in choosing a career in the field of aging and how their own career path led to their current employment in the field of aging. Fifteen professionals in the field of aging, ranging in age from 23 to 34, participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Results confirmed prior research that professionals working in the field of aging come from a variety of disciplines. Participants noted attractive aspects of a career in the field of aging, including flexibility and mobility. To increase the upcoming generations' interest in a career in the field of aging, participants suggested integrating information about aging and not-so-obvious careers in aging into high school, college, and university courses; doing more to tackle stigma and stereotypes associated with aging; and undertaking a "making aging cool" campaign. Results of the study cannot be generalized. Future research could investigate perceptions of satisfaction and happiness in persons working in the field of aging, include more diverse samples, and examine the effectiveness of the participants' ideas to increase interest in choosing a career in aging.

CAREERS IN AGING: INCREASING INTEREST AND INVESTIGATING
CAREER PATHS

by

Paul Cunnington

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Family and Consumer Sciences
Western Michigan University
May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give recognition to my wonderful committee who has helped me through this thesis process: Dr. Karen Blaisure, Dr. Janet Hahn, and Dr. Angel Gullon-Rivera. You all are a wealth of knowledge and I am very lucky to have had the level of support you have all provided to aid me in the pursuit of my academic goals.

I would like to thank the faculty and staff in the Family and Consumer Sciences Department at Western Michigan University. Particularly, I would like to thank Dr. Gary Bischof for his support during my entire graduate experience.

Finally, I'd like to thank a few people outside of my academic life. To my parents, Linda and Alan, without your never-ending support I would not have been able to make it this far. Thanks for believing in me and pushing me to reach for the stars.

Kimberly, you always knew how to make me laugh when I needed a smile during this process. Marc, I love you very much. Thank you for all of the support during the long nights of writing and times when I needed a listening ear.

Paul Cunnington

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services – Administration on Aging, the population of older adults aged sixty-five years of age and older reached 43.1 million in 2012 (Administration on Aging, 2013). Since 2002, the older adult population increased 21 percent and is predicted to reach a population total of 79.7 million older adults by 2040 (Administration on Aging, 2013). These statistics demonstrate a rapidly growing segment of the overall population.

The documented growth rate of older adults is igniting a look at the study of aging and the professionals involved in the aging field. Heinemann, Douglass, and Whittington (2003) define gerontology as, “the study of the aging process and individuals as they grow from middle age through later life” (p. 2). Heinemann et al. noted that gerontology includes three different parts: (1) The study of physical, mental, and social changes in older people as they age; (2) the investigation of the changes in society resulting from our aging population; (3) and the application of this knowledge to policies and programs. Individuals with careers in gerontology will be key in the successful handling of the growing older adult population.

It should be recognized that gerontology is different than geriatrics. Geriatrics is a look into diseases and health issues that affect older adults along with overall healthcare of all elders (Heinemann et al., 2003). There is a recognized discord with different definitions of gerontology available, with some using gerontology as an umbrella term to include all aging careers. Other definitions treat geriatrics and gerontology as two separate entities. This study will follow the model set forth by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, which defines gerontology and geriatrics separately (Heinemann, et al., 2003) and will only focus on what is considered to be gerontology.

With the current and expected growth rates of older adults, it is important to ensure there are an adequate number of people trained in the field of aging to handle the expected increased pressure on existing social structures for aging. Gerontology has seven main career categories that include: Advocates, Direct Service Providers, Educators/Trainers, Managers/Administrators, Marketers and Product Developers, Program Planners and Evaluators, and Researchers (Heinemann et al., 2003).

Throughout this study, words such as elders, senior population, elderly, older adults will be used interchangeably. All of these terms used are referring to the group of persons aged 65 years and older. The phrases 'careers in aging' and 'careers in gerontology' will also be used interchangeably.

Purposes

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain perspectives from young professionals working in the field aging on how to increase interest in choosing a career in the field of aging and how their own career path led to their current employment in the field of aging. Several practical reasons exist as to why the completion of this study was significant and necessary. First, there is concern for a shortage in the workforce that provides services to the aging (Kanel, & Horn-Mallers, 2015). Bial (2005) also notes a considerable possibility of a future scarcity of available workers in aging.

Second, there is predicted growth of various jobs in aging that will need to be filled by qualified persons to keep up with demand. For example, the Bureau of Labor statistics (2014a) predicts a 22 percent growth in social and human service assistants from 2012 to 2012, which includes jobs working with the elderly or in the general field of aging.

Finally, there is a shortage of available and current literature around the topic of increasing interest in working with older adults and career paths taken to careers in aging. Completion of this research study helps to build on what literature is currently available on the topic and perhaps guide future research surrounding this topic. As Eshbaugh, Gross, and Satrom (2010) concluded, “A qualitative study might be useful to further explore the diverse journeys that bring people to want to devote themselves to working with elders” (p. 326).

Summary

This research study has been written into five chapters along with sections for references and an appendix. The first chapter covers an introduction of the topic. The second chapter gives a further look into the literature supporting this research. The third chapter discusses details of the methodology used in the research. The fourth chapter is a discussion of the results after data analysis. Finally, chapter five contains a summary and discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and implications for practice and research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section gives background information about the changing older adult population. Section two gives information about careers in aging including evidence of growth, where growth will occur, and exploring a career path to becoming a professional in the field of aging. Section three covers what is currently known about interest in working with the elderly including predictive factors for persons to work with elders.

Background on Older Adults

The current generations of adults aged 65 and older are unique when compared to previous generations. As previously stated, the older adult population is growing at a rapid rate. The U.S. Census Bureau (AOA, 2013) stated that the population of persons aged 65 and older has increased 7.6 million, about 21% from 2002 to 2012, reaching a total of 43.1 million in 2012. Many elders are now living longer lives than previous generations of older adults. In 2011, men and women aged 65 were predicted to live an average of 19.2 additional years beyond 65 years of age (AOA, 2013). Additionally, the overall number of those aged 85 and older is predicted to rise to 14.1 million by 2014, more than

doubling the 5.9 million from 2012 (AOA, 2013). Elders in society are more common now due to the increased life expectancy. Thirteen point seven percent of the population consists of older adults, which is about one in every seven persons (AOA, 2013).

Older adults are challenging the way they have been viewed throughout history in terms of work, social involvement, and delivery of services (Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology, 2014). They are demonstrating a unique collection of possible circumstances for both society and for themselves (Wiener, 2006). One significant change has been in the overall diversity of the older adult population. Diversity among older adults has increased with 2012 having 21% (8.9 million) of the elder population being a racial or ethnic minority (AOA, 2013). This number is expected to increase to 20.2 million by 2030, reaching 28% of the population. The greatest increase is expected to take place in those who identify to be of Hispanic or Asian origin (Morgan & Kunkel, 2007). Ethnic minority older adult groups are estimated to grow 126% while the total of number white older adults are predicted to grow by only 54% between 2012 and 2030 (AOA, 2013).

Another significant change occurring in older adults is the level of education obtained. Levels of education of persons aged 65 and older will increase greatly due to baby boomers (New Strategist Editors, 2012). Over 80 percent of older adults now have a high school diploma (New Strategist Editors,

2012). The number of older adults that have obtained higher education beyond high school has increased as well. Twenty three percent of older adults in 2010 identified as having a bachelor's degree or more (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2012). This is significant when compared to the year 1965 when only 5 percent of older adults held a bachelor's degree or more (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2012).

In regards to health status among older adults, many older adults identify as having very good or excellent health, about 41% of the total older adult population. This percentage lessens as persons become older (New Strategist Editors, 2012). Over the years rates of death have declined for several diseases but have increased for others (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2012). Stroke and heart disease rates of death for persons aged 65 and older declined by more than 50 percent between 1981 and 2009 (Federal Interagency Forum, 2012) Chronic respiratory disease death rates have increased by 57 percent between 1981 and 2009 (Federal Interagency Forum, 2012).

When looking at retirement, fewer older adults are retiring early. A greater number of older adults are working longer into older age with 74 percent of older workers expecting to retire when they reach 65 or after (New Strategist Editors, 2012).

The different characteristics of this older adult population have even stirred up suggested changes in how they are referred to. Changes suggested include a break down of the older adult population into three separate age groups. The *young - old* would be those aged 65 to 74 years old. *Middle-old* persons would be 75 to 84 years old. Lastly, those aged 85 and older would be considered the *oldest-old* (Vierck & Hodges, 2005).

Background on Careers in Aging

There is evidence of growing interest in aging related careers and subject matter. Grabinski (2007) recognizes four factors that are credited to helping the observed growth of career paths related to aging and increased interest in the subject. The first factor discusses the implementation of “aging specific federal legislation” (p. 2). The Older Americans Act established in 1965 is an influential legislation that affects the older adult population. This legislation was started due to the growing concern at the lack of social services for older adults available (Administration on Aging, 2014). The federal agency, the Administration on Aging, was created through the Older Americans act to oversee implementation of social services, community planning and employee instruction through grants given to states (Administration on Aging, 2014). Medicare and Medicaid were also enacted in 1965 providing federally funded health insurance for those 65 and over and long-term care coverage for individuals with low-incomes (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2013).

The second factor discussed by Grabinski (2007) is the continued growth of those aged 65 and older. Third, many higher education institutions such as universities and community colleges have created gerontology-based programs which offer opportunities to complete various levels of gerontology based education.

Finally, Grabinski recognizes local, state, and national organizations for professionals in gerontology to be very influential to growing interest in careers in aging. However, with all four factors increasing growth and interest there is still more work needed to investigate how to build on this growth to meet increasing demand for more qualified workers in the field of aging.

Demand for more qualified workers in gerontological careers is gaining more attention over time. It has been noted by Wiener (2006) that “by most accounts, careers in the fields of aging are going to be among the next big things in the 21st century workplace” (p. 1). Eshbaugh et al. (2010) stated, “there is an anticipated need for workers knowledgeable about the aging process and the need and wants of the aging population” (p. 327).

As the dynamics of the aging population have changed, many jobs have been and will continue to change to adapt to changes brought on by the newer generations of elders. Eshbaugh et al. (2010) supposed, “future careers in aging will not be limited to obvious aging careers such as social work, nursing, and long term care administration”(p. 327). In addition, there is an observable shift

occurring in the view of employment in the field of aging. The shift is moving the study of aging away from a purely research and disease model. Wiener (2006) believes the redefinition of gerontology has had a large influence on this phenomenon.

Previously mentioned, there exist seven main career categories of careers in aging (Heinemann et al., 2003). Advocates work to represent the older adult population and bring awareness to major issues in aging. Many advocates frequently push for involvement from government and the private sector (Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology, 2014). Direct service providers handle the legal, health, psychological, or social services utilized by older adults. Educators and trainers teach programs aimed at older adults and families. Also included is education for persons interested in the aging field or those seeking continued education. Managers and administrators supervise all aspects of the institutions that exist in aging. Marketers and product developers create new services and products aimed at older adults. Program planners and evaluators have the goal of identifying needs and interests of elders. Finally, researchers make inquiries about all aspects of aging. From investigation of program effectiveness to physical aging, more researchers are needed for social science and biological research of aging. (Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Gerontology, 2014). Many careers choices are available which involve aspects of aging. Several of these careers

involve direct interaction with elders. Other jobs entail less direct contact, but still work to help and support seniors.

There is a discontent in literature on about what qualifies someone to be a professional in aging and what the proper titles are for professionals in aging. Most definitions note the need to have a formal degree but others indicate someone only needs to have an overall understanding of aging. Grabinski, a leader in setting standards for future gerontology professionals, has attempted to address these issues through her several writings.

Grabinski (2007) notes that the title of gerontologist requires a degree in aging studies or gerontology, completed at the undergraduate or graduate level. Gerontological Specialists may have a principal interest for their work to be conducted with or completed on behalf of older adults. Grabinski mentioned that not all Gerontological Specialists are gerontologists (2007). Grabinski's perspective is in contrast to AGHE (2014) who state, "As a result of the multidisciplinary focus of gerontology, professionals from diverse fields call themselves "gerontologists" (p. 2). This statement does not specifically state that a specific form of education, if any, is needed to be a gerontologist.

The field of aging does not yet formally recognize the terminology and career ladder identified by Grabinski. However, Grabinski believes the field could be at the beginning of setting standards that would be agreed upon across the field of aging. Grabinski (2010) states that further enhancing a standardized

career ladder for the field of aging would lead to increased career options and appropriate recognition for professionals in aging. There would also be better-defined roles in the field and paths toward proper education. Finally, Grabinski (2010) claims these standards could help to provide a foundation for anyone seeking credentials or a licensure. This standardization may even protect consumers from persons who identify as a gerontologist but have no reasonable basis to hold that designation (Grabinski, 2010).

With careers in aging there often been no clear and defined path that leads to a specific aging-related career in gerontology. Now, as the field of gerontology has been further developed, careers paths in aging are becoming more accepted and recognized. There now exist three main avenues in education that may lead to becoming a professional in aging as defined by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (2014). The first avenue is choosing to have a specialty area of aging along with what is seen as a traditional discipline in higher education. This avenue may include majors such as psychology, architecture, sociology, and so forth. The next option is to simply choose gerontology as a major or degree. At the present time, there exist more than 500 higher educational settings that offer various levels of gerontological education from specific majors to concentrations and specializations in gerontology (Grabinski, 2007). The third option is continuing education for those with interest in the area of aging. Continuing education may be best for those

currently working who may want further education on aging (AGHE, 2014). It should be noted that not all who are employed in the field of aging have been specifically trained to become a professional in aging. A job opportunity in aging may have been stumbled upon during a search for employment. In addition, someone who simply needed a job and was given the opportunity may have ended up in an aging related job.

Many different careers will be thriving in the field of aging. The newest trend among professionals serving older adults is furthering ways to remain independent and productive, and aging in place (Wiener, 2006). Wiener acknowledged a few examples of several industries that will flourish with the growing aging population. Development of consumer products will be very important in terms of developing electronic and digital products for older adult use. Developing housing for aging adults will be flourishing as new construction is built with aging adults kept in mind and homes and communities are built to support aging in place (Wiener, 2006). Also included in the list were business and financial services, fitness and wellness, and travel (Wiener, 2006).

Predictive Factors of Choosing a Career in Aging

Literature exists which identifies several attributes a person may possess which may be a predicting factor in choosing a career in the aging field.

One factor is having some level of participation in the care of an older adult during childhood (Robert & Mosher-Ashley, 2000). This early exposure can be

highly influential for a future career. Another potential influencing factor is the way an interest in working with older adults is modeled for students. Modeling affects a student's choice to further pursue the discipline. A bad modeling of interest in aging may discourage student interest in working with older adults (Paton, Sar, Barber, & Holland, 2001). Supported is provided Robert and Mosher-Ashley (2000) who say students are less likely to choose a career in aging if their perception of working with older adults is one that contains negative attributes.

There is a strong connection between regular contact with family members who are older adults and developing interest in the field of aging (Gorelik, Damron-Rodriguez, Funderburk, & Solomon, 2000). More frequent contact may indicate a greater desire to work in aging. Additionally, people interested working in the field of aging are often identified to have low anxiety about death (Eshbaugh et al., 2010). Finally, gender may be a key factor in choosing a career in aging. It has been identified that females are more likely than males to choose a career that involves helping older adults (Robert and Mosher-Ashley, 2000). All of these qualities demonstrate that some persons may be more likely to choose a career in aging when compared to other people. Different life experiences may be influential in choosing a career in aging as well as different personal characteristics.

Summary

The population of older adults is increasing and will continue to increase. This new wave of older adults contains many unique characteristics and qualities that bring a new definition of what it means to be an older adult in society as an individual and as a whole population. There is documented growth in persons wishing to work with older adults but that growth is not significant enough to keep up with the expected demand for future aging related careers. Literature reports possibilities that some people may be more likely than other to work with older adults. There is also discontent in what it means to be a professional in aging and what qualifies someone to be a professional in aging. Continued focus on career paths in aging will help to shape the future of aging related education and career definitions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study aimed to (1) to investigate what young professionals in the field of aging believe can be done to generate an increased interest in choosing a career in the field of aging and (2) to explore the career path taken to their current job in aging. This study's design is qualitative, that is, it seeks to explore feelings and thoughts of individuals. The study is also less restrictive in that the researcher was able to freely move about the interview guide as the conversation developed and additional question probes could be given to further explore a certain topic or answer.

A thematic analysis was used to examine the data. Thematic analysis can be considered both a tool, i.e., thematic coding, used within major qualitative analytic methods and as a "method in its own right" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In this present study, thematic analysis is used as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). These themes signify a pattern occurring across the data that shows something significant which is related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes found through thematic analysis may also be referred to as "patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). The flexibility aspect of

thematic analysis gives the researcher the opportunity to review a particular aspect of the data or find a pattern across all data produced (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is also able to take larger amounts of data and organize it into smaller pieces and helps to express collected data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With thematic analysis, commonalities across data may appear, but might not be important for the situation. The researcher is able to discover which patterns and commonalities in the data set are significant to the question or subject (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Thematic analysis as an approach is appropriate for this study to support the goal of exploring perspectives of different persons and finding common themes between all of the answers given. It is also appropriate because thematic analysis allows the researcher to code data around specific questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants working in the field of gerontology were interviewed using a qualitative format. Qualitative interviewing allows participants to give answers based on what they believe is most important (Barbour, 2008). Qualitative research also involves a different format of questions than quantitative. Qualitative research is comprised of semi-structured and open-ended questions regarding understandings, beliefs, and processes (Barbour, 2008) which is what many of the questions in this study aimed to explore regarding the topic.

Recruitment

The participants involved with this research project were professionals in the field of aging that fell under the categories of jobs in gerontology as defined by Heinemann et al. (2003). These categories are: Advocates, Direct Service Providers, Educators/Trainers, Managers/Administrators, Marketers and Product Developers, Program Planners and Evaluators, and Researchers. Participants were between the ages of 22 and 35. Except for one category, four or more persons per job category were interviewed to give the opportunity of representation to all career areas. Interviews were also conducted with multiple participants, giving greater opportunity for differentiation in data.

After HSIRB approval was granted for this study by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University (See Appendix A) outreach for potential participants was completed through several means. Recruitment strategies included two listserv e-mail systems, distribution of 50 handouts, word of mouth, approaching persons through professional contexts, distributing materials to professionals known to the researchers, requesting agencies distribute information, and contacting professionals when their contact information was publicly available (i.e., on a government or university website).

Many of the recruitment strategies were completed through a regional professionals in aging group. Professional contexts included a meeting that regularly occurs once a month for the regional professionals on aging group.

Word of mouth was also completed through professional contacts passing on information about the study to other professionals in the field of aging that may be interested or may know of persons who may qualify for the study. (See Appendix B for a copy of the email messages, and script for the announcements at a regional meeting and handout). Also, as an incentive for participation in the study, potential participants were informed that one participant would receive a \$25 Visa gift card through a random drawing.

When contact was received regarding interest in participation from a potential subject, the investigator thanked the individual for the expressed interest. If enough participants had already been recruited, the potential participant was informed that the study had gained enough participants. If the investigator was still looking for participants, the investigator reviewed the inclusionary criteria with the potential participant. The potential participant was asked if she or he is between the ages of 22 and 35. If this criterion was met, the potential participant was then asked if his or her current job is in the field of aging/gerontology. If yes, then the potential subject was asked about the percentage of time they divide between the categories of careers in aging. If the top answers matched a career category that still needed representation, the participant met all required criteria. The potential subject was then informed that she or he met all of the required criteria and asked if she or he would like to set up a meeting to review the consent document and proceed with the

interview should they agree to participate. If yes, a meeting was set up between the participant and investigator to review the study, review the consent document, answer questions, and, if the interested person agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent document, proceed with the interview. If at any time a potential participant did not meet any criterion needed for the study, the individual was informed about not meeting the required criteria needed to participate in the study.

Sampling Plan

The research project used two types of sampling. These included convenience sampling, and a form of purposive sampling called snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves finding several study participants that match the study criteria, then having those identified participants recommend other potential participants (Tracy, 2012). Convenience sampling is sampling which involves fairly easy access to a population at a low cost (Tracy, 2012). Both sampling types are forms of non-probability sampling because the research participants are not randomly selected. A form of purposive sampling was ideal for this study in order to make sure all of the pre-selected criteria were met. Snowball sampling was used in order to reach more potential participants and to ensure persons were found to represent each pre-determined job category.

Data Collection

On the day of the meeting with the potential participant, the purpose of the study was reviewed, a consent form was provided for the potential participant to read, and time was allowed to respond to any questions about the study or participating in it. The potential participant was also reminded that if he or she agreed to participate, the interview was to be audio recorded and he or she were asked to confirm that they are comfortable with being audio recorded. If the individual agreed to participate, he or she was asked to sign a consent document; the interview began after the consent document was signed.

If an interview was being conducted by phone, a consent document was mailed or e-mailed to the potential participant. When the signed consent document was returned, it was reviewed to ensure it was signed by the potential participant.

The likelihood of risks from the study design was low. A subject may have potentially experienced psychological discomfort while discussing information about career path or education. To protect from possible risks and discomforts, participants were reminded that they do not need to answer a question they are not comfortable with answering. If necessary, participants were also given a list of resources that they could access (See Appendix C for list of resources).

The sites of study varied based on the situation for each participant. Ideally, the interviews were to be completed at each participant's place of work. Another option was to meet in an agreed public space such as a room on the

university campus or meeting room at the public library where confidentiality could be maintained. Finally, if necessary, interviews were able to be completed over the phone. All options allowed for proper recording and completion of interviews as designed. Four interviews took place at the participant's place of work, two interviews took place in a private meeting room on campus, and nine interviews took place over the phone.

For this study, qualitative interviewing was used (See Appendix D). For qualitative interviewing, the primary instrument is the researcher (Tracy, 2012). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews allowed for more or less information to be gathered by the researcher based on the data the researcher receives in the field. Semi-structured interviews allowed diversion from the list of questions if needed to further explore a topic that was discussed or to skip questions as necessary. If a participant finished answering a question but did not provide enough information the researcher needed, probing question prompts were used to encourage the participant to elaborate or further explain their answer. Examples of question prompts included "Can you please elaborate about..." and "Could you please tell me more about..." There was also increased freedom in determining the order of the questions to be answered during each interview based on the direction and content of the interview. As interviews took place, some participants gave answers that related to other questions on the list and those questions were then followed-up on instead of

the next question on the interview script. Finally, the conversational style of the interview allowed for additional flexibility in the interview and to encourage the interviewee to feel more comfortable when answering, compared to having a more structured answering protocol. Comfort during interviews was noted by participants' speaking as long as they felt necessary for each question. Also, comfort during the interview was noted through various participants laughing at their own commentary and their sharing of short stories and anecdotes.

Interviews lasted from ten to twenty minutes. A voice recorder was used to record each participant interview. Field notes were also taken by hand during interviews. Field notes are important pieces and observations of dialogue noted by the researcher during the interview. The notes consisted of quick jottings completed by the researcher to highlight important information heard during the interview. The notes were also be used later as comparison to recorded interviews to verify authenticity. The researcher also kept a research journal throughout the data collection process. The journal contained writings such as personal feelings and reflexive thoughts (Bailey, 2007).

All transcription of interviews was completed by the researcher. Transcripts created from interviews and field notes were stored on the personal laptop computer of the researcher. The laptop was password protected and each file pertaining to the research was password protected. Any hand written notes or other documents related to the research were placed in folders and stored in

a locked file cabinet in the thesis chair's locked office space when not in use. The sheet with codes identifying each participant was also securely stored in the thesis chair's office to ensure protection of privacy. It should be noted that all participants were assigned a unique code and a pseudonym to protect identification of participants. Also, all demographic information collected was reported in a general manner to protect participants from identification. Additionally all places of employment and job positions are referred to in general terminology to prevent possible identification.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the step where the researcher works to make sense of all the data collected (Bailey, 2007). Data are usually broken down, looked at piece by piece, given value of significance, and has meaning derived from it all (Bailey, 2007). For this research, all hand-written field notes and recorded interviews were transcribed into computer documents for further analysis. Transcription for each interview took place as soon as possible after the interview while the information was still fresh and the researcher was more familiar with what just occurred.

Data analysis began after the interview had been transcribed. Thematic analysis guided the data analysis process. Thematic analysis includes coding data after transcription (Boyatzis, 1998). Coding is the organization of sizeable amounts of data into smaller pieces (Bailey, 2007). Coding assists in identifying

broad themes and patterns in the interviews and documents. Coding participants' interviews produced an initial eight themes. Original sub-themes were reviewed for relevance and consistency. Themes were also reviewed by a committee member as a check on researcher bias. When reviewed a second time, the eight themes were developed into ten sub-themes. These ten sub-themes were then organized under two main themes. The first overall theme is "Journey" and includes subthemes of identified career categories, initial interest, education, direction, and staying in the field. The second overall theme is "Perception" and includes sub-themes of beliefs about young professionals, advice, increasing interest, and job security. A significant word, passion, was also identified when discussing themes in data.

Reliability/Validity

Validity is the degree that research protocols construct a truthful account of the world (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Validity in the study was completed through triangulation of methods. Data from the transcribed interviews, field notes, and the researcher's research journal was cross-compared to ensure authenticity in the data.

Reliability is the level in which a replicated research study generates the same outcomes (Bloor & Wood, 2006). The researcher's research journal helped in the aid of reliability by serving as "an audit trail of methodological decisions and analytical hypotheses for the research" (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p.151).

Credibility

Peer review throughout the study process helped establish credibility for this study. Peer review involved obtaining professional support from committee members. Credibility was also established through the asking of questions about collection methods, analysis of all data, and interpretation of analyzed data. These questions helped to keep the research honest (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

The researcher also practiced reflexivity throughout the study. Having reflexivity allows a researcher to be more aware of their possible personal influence on different aspects of a research study such as procedures or data interpretation (Krefting, 1991). Reflexivity may help to minimize researcher influence and bias in the outcomes of the completed study.

Participants

Fifteen professionals in the field of aging participated in this study. Participants were located in five counties from different regions of a Midwestern state. They each identified the percentage of time divided between the seven career categories in aging. If the percentage of time spent under a career category was identified as 25% or more of their job, that career category was represented by that participant. Seven of the categories were represented by three or more participants; the research job category was represented by one participant. Ages of participants ranged from 23 to 34 years of age. Thirteen

participants were women; two were men. In terms of ethnicity, fourteen were white and one was Asian. They had worked in the field of aging between two months and eight years. A majority had been working in the field of aging over one year. Table 1 lists participants and their percent of work in the job categories. Some participants gave more complex percentages than others. Also noted was that many participants gave percentages that added up to 100%, but some participants did not.

Table 1. Identified Job Category Percentages

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Job Title</i>	<i>Percentage of work in job categories</i>
Emma	Program Coordinator	Advocates- 10% Direct Service Providers- 30% Educators/Trainers- 30% Managers/Administrators- 5% Marketers and Product Developers- 15% Program Planners and Evaluators- 5% Researchers- 5%
Christopher	Service Coordinator	Advocates- 10% Direct Service Providers- 80% Educators/Trainers- 10%
Karen	Life Enrichment Director	Manager/Administrators- 50% Marketers and Product Developers- 50%
Darla	Medical Social Worker	Advocates- 33% Direct Service Providers- 33% Educators/Trainers- 33%
Denice	Quality Assurance Coordinator	Advocates- 25% Managers/Administrators- 10% Program Planners and Evaluators- 60% Researchers- 5%
Samantha	Program Manager	Managers/Administrators- 60% Marketers and Product Developers- 40%
Laney	Senior Center Social Worker	Advocates- 30% Educators/Trainers- 5%

Table 1. Continued

		Mangers/Administrators- 10% Program Planners and Evaluators- 50% Researchers- 5%
Haley	Community Social Worker	Advocates- 50% Direct Service Providers- 50%
Natalie	Housing Specialist	Advocates- 60% Direct Service Providers- 40%
Mary	Community Relations Specialist	Advocates- 5% Educators/Trainers- 5% Managers/Administrators- 60% Marketers and Product Developers- 5% Program Planners and Evaluators- 25%
Linda	Outreach Specialist	Advocates- 25% Direct Service- 30% Educators/Trainers- 45%
Reese	Advocacy Manager	Advocates- 65% Educators/Trainers- 5% Program Planners and Evaluators- 5% Researchers- 25%
Adrian	Social Service Technician	Managers/Administrators- 50% Marketers and Product Developers- 50%
April	Lifestyle Manager	Managers/Administrators- 50% Program Planners and Evaluators- 50%
Whitney	Volunteer Program Coordinator	Advocates- 35% Educators/Trainers- 25% Marketers and Product Developers- 25%

Background and Motivation of Researcher

The motivation to complete this research project comes from several different places. The first area is a personal concern for a lack of qualified professionals in aging for the vastly increasing older adult population. The second inspiration is my grandmother who lives with my immediate family. Having a close relationship with my grandmother seems to be a rarity for many persons my age, especially for being a male. I also believe that younger

professionals in aging are going to be very important for the future of any company or service related to older adults. I also believe younger professionals bring unique perspectives on problems that exist, such as the looming necessity to attract more qualified workers to the field of aging.

I have completed several internships and practicum experiences at various aging related agencies or places that have included services to the aging. These have included county and regional offices on aging and the Department of Human Services. My Bachelors degree is from Western Michigan University in Family Studies with minors in psychology and sociology.

Summary

The study used thematic analysis to analyze data. Interviews were conducted using a qualitative format. Snowball and convenience sampling were used to reach potential participants. Participants were young professionals in the field of aging who represented seven career categories in the field of aging. Interviews took place in person and over the phone depending on location of the participant. Data was transcribed and coded as soon as possible after each interview.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was: (1) to investigate what young professionals in the field of aging believe can be done to generate an increased interest in choosing a career in the field of aging and (2) to explore the career path taken to their current job in aging. Fifteen participants were interviewed using qualitative interviewing. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified to fall between two main themes, which are: (1) Journey and (2) Perception. Several sub-themes were identified under each main theme category. Journeys of young professionals in aging were identified to be diverse in terms of what brought professionals into aging, the career categories they identified under, stage of career path, and educational backgrounds. Perceptions of young professionals suggest there are several ways to attract additional young professionals to the field of aging as well as several barriers to what may attract someone to the field.

Throughout the interviews, a word seemed to stand from the rest as an important concept. That word is passion. The word passion was directly used by three participants but implied by several more through energy and animation while they talked. Overall, 66% percent of participants were identified to have indicated passion related to working in the field of aging. Passion was used to

describe personal feelings about working in the field and to describe the overall workforce in the field of aging. Emma mentioned passion a few times,

“Having worked in the field of aging now for a couple of years, I have found that it’s a passion of mine, that I feel I can make a difference in the field, that there is a lot of room to grow and that there’s the need and I feel like people who are in the profession have that passion. I feel like a lot of professionals I interact with have a desire to stay in this field and to make a difference and to work hard at it and that makes me want to stay and having other passionate professionals around me as well.”

Christopher also supported the idea of passion as a theme in the aging workforce by stating, *“People in aging are generally passionate about the field”*.

Journey

When discussing career categories, several participants mentioned that everyday in the job field is different and each day they might do work under one career category and a different day act in another category. Also, many participants mentioned that their job consists of at least a small portion of each career category they identified under. The following sections describe how the participants describe what they do in a job category.

Identified Career Categories

Most participants identified that they act as an advocate in their job. Identification as a direct service provider came second. Less identified categories were educators/trainers, marketers/product developers, with the least identified category being those who identified as a researcher.

Advocates. Advocates identified their advocacy efforts took place at two different levels. One level of advocacy described by participants occurred inside and among organizations and agencies to ensure individuals receive the services they need. Another type of advocacy involved policy making, that is the creation and support of legislations and laws that directly affect older adults and aging. This policy-focused advocacy included meeting with legislators and representatives who ultimately decided what happens regarding law and policy on aging.

Direct service providers. Direct service providers interacted directly with older adults to present a wide array of services. Direct services provided included examples such as moving and housing transition assistance, providing recreational and therapy activities, and connection to the resources needed for quality of life.

Educators and trainers. Educators and trainers reported conducting education presentations internally for organizations and externally for the community regarding different topics in aging and about what their respective organization or agency can do to help older adults.

Managers and administrators. Managers and administrators were often in charge of directing other staff members and producing a lot of “behind the scenes” work such as creation of reports, handling grant applications, and

general supervision of the activities of the agency or organization or program they oversee.

Marketers and product developers. Marketers and product developers were identified to go into the community and advertise for the agency they are a part of and to provide information on what is available through the agency. Marketing and product development was conducted through the development and distribution of promotional materials. Marketing and product development also occurred through identification of what ways were most effective to inform as many people as possible.

Program planners and evaluators. Program planners and evaluators created and designed programs that agencies offered. Program planners and evaluators indicated they would analyze effectiveness of programs to make sure programs were making the greatest impact and reaching as many persons as possible. All program planners and evaluators had a bachelor's degree with one person having a master's degree.

Researcher. Being a researcher in the field of aging involved researching impacts of possible decisions before actual implementation of any changes in an agency that helps a large number of older adults. This work included identifying possible impacts such as returns on investments, possible outcomes of a program, projected growth, and so forth. Research data produced were used to

help shape the future of programs and the agency as whole to better serve the older adult population.

Initial Interest

Initial interest in aging is what has inspired many professionals to choose a career path in aging. These participants shared various reasons may exist as to why and how someone may have encountered their initial interest in aging. The professionals interviewed reported several different reasons as to how they became involved. Reasons included exposure to aging family members, parental influence, discovery of the field during college, and discovery of a career in aging during a search for employment.

Three participants identified their initial interest in working with older adults as being a personal experience from exposure to aging family members.

For example:

"I kind of related it to my personal experiences. I've had some family members with dementia and have been closer with older relatives and that kind of....I think that impacted my initial interest in it."

Conversely, two interviewees commented that they were exposed to aging family members but did not attribute this exposure to their decision to choose a career in aging. One participant reported exposure to aging family members was not influential in their choice to pursue a career in aging. The participant attributed the lack of influence to the aging family members were still young, even though they fit titles such as "grandparent."

Two participants also said their interest in the field of aging was influenced by having a parent who worked in the field of aging. Interest in the field of aging was also discovered by a few participants who had already been in college for a time before deciding aging was the career area they wanted to focus on. One participant stated, *"I was actually very interested in aging beginning in my junior and senior years of undergraduate school."* Another participant said, *"I didn't realize that I wanted to start going towards geriatrics as a career until I was about a sophomore in my undergrad."* Inspiration to choose aging as a career path in college was identified as coming from taking a class which contained aging related content. More specifically, two different participants identified their initial interest stemming from taking an introduction to social work course at their respective university. One mentioned, *"Then I went into college and took and intro to social work class for an elective and fell in love with social work."*

Interest in working with the older adult population was also discovered once a couple participants were searching for employment and obtained a job in the field.

"It's kind of something I had always thought about. But it wasn't until a job came along and I applied for it..."

"And aging was something that I have thought about but it became more serious when a job was available"

Education

Education level varied among study participants. Most persons identified as having completed a Bachelors degree (N=8). Not far behind were people who completed Master's degrees (N=5). Two participants reported having a high school education, and one of these two is pursuing a college degree. The majority of bachelor's and all of the master's degrees achieved by study participants were in social work. Other bachelor's degrees achieved included: sociology, psychology, international studies and tourism management, family studies, social science, political science, recreation, and business. One participant also identified as having a law degree. Three participants identified as having completed a degree, minor, or graduate certificate, specifically geared toward working with aging or older adults. These included two gerontology minors, a master's degree in social work with a geriatric specialization, a graduate gerontology certificate, and a masters in social work with a concentration in services to the aging.

Most of the participants acknowledged that education was a good base to starting their career and may have prepared them for many aspects of a career in aging, but noted that education did not fully prepare anyone for their job.

"I think that my education was a good starting point and...I think that my education prepared me personally. I don't feel that the education prepared me for the day-to-day as much, just the general knowledge of what resources are needed and what are available."

"I think that my education only prepared me for so much because I've been able to use a lot of different skills and tools that I've picked up along the way. But as far as my specific job currently, I think that there is a learning curve to any job that you're going to have."

A few participants wished they had more preparation and explanation on how to navigate resources and agencies in the community.

"I think one of the things I wish I could have gotten more training on is navigating resources. I know I moved to a new area but I feel like I really didn't have the knowledge or the skills to...just to navigate the community resources".

"I would want a better idea of how you navigate agencies like the Department of Human Services, Department of Community Health that kind of thing, because that's a lot to pick up and it's something I'm still learning."

Many participants took classes at some point in their career path. Of those who took classes, four identified their initial interest to come from exposure to an aging family member. One participant took classes after their interest came from having a parent working in the field of aging. Another participant took classes after already being in the workforce, then discovering their interest in aging.

Direction

Interview participants were at different stages of their career in the field of aging. When looking at identified career categories, categories were mixed as to which categories held those in the field for the shortest time compared to others in the field for a longer period of time. A few participants ended up in the aging field only after working in an unrelated field prior. Before a career in aging, those identified as working in an unrelated career field before worked in areas such as retail, law, hospitality, and human services. Four participants described their career path to involve switching between multiple jobs in the field of aging

before reaching their current position. For many, they were at the beginning of their career path with their current job being their first position in the field of aging. Lastly, four people identified as having an interest in the field of aging, only to pursue an unrelated career field. Eventually these four came back to aging and found a job in their original interest area of aging. Participants leaving and returning to the field identified their reasoning as being unsure about the field, wishing to try out other career areas, and pressure from external influences that a career in aging was not the direction to be taking. Those who left the field of aging for a time because of external influences noted family and friends were urging a career path change because of a negative view of working in aging. Specifically, two participants on a social work path stated:

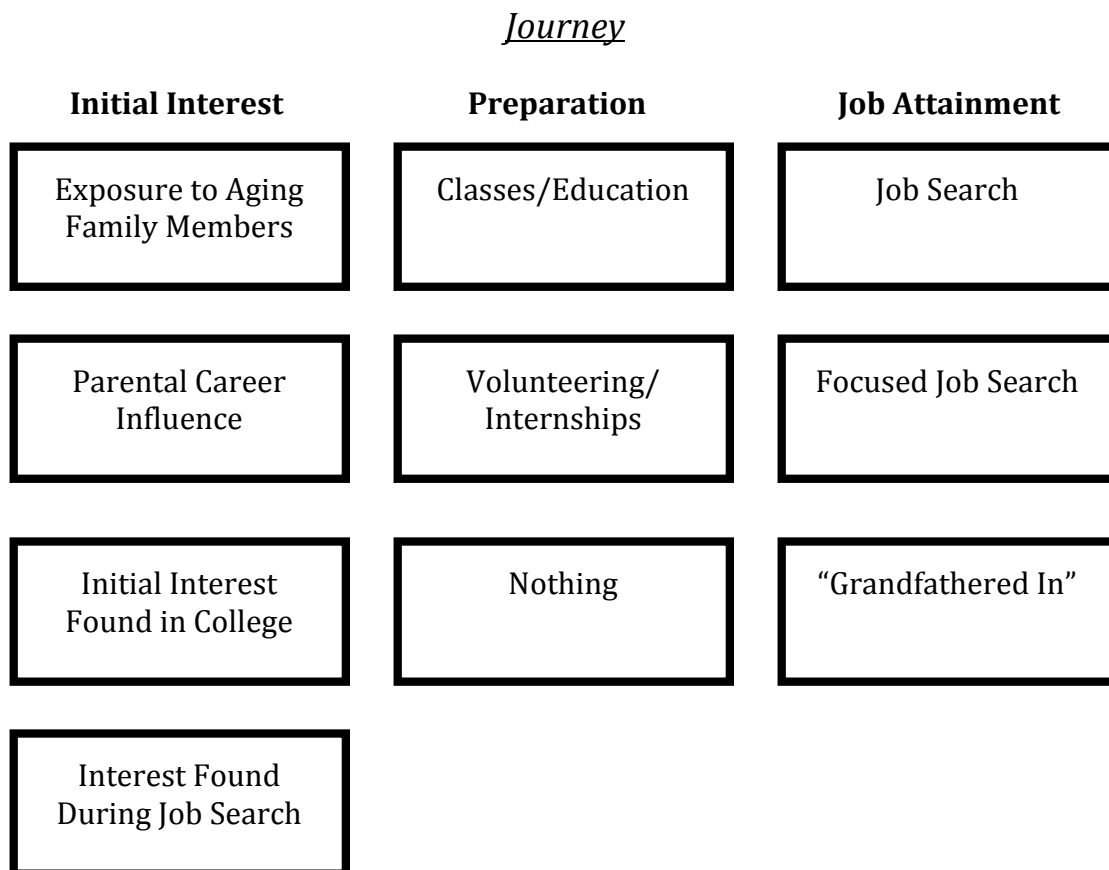
“I was always told that its good to work with children and that I should work with kids.”

“My parents pressured me to work with children. Everyone I’ve met has always said I should be in a field with children.”

Figure 1 explores journey options of participants. The first column, *Initial Interest*, indicates where participants initial interest in the field of aging stemmed from. The second column, *Preparation*, indicates options participants took to ensure they were prepared before going into the workforce. The third column, *Job Attainment*, indicates the end result of finding a job in the field of aging. Job search indicates a job search was implemented, but a career in aging was not specifically aimed for. A focused job search signifies that a job search

was conducted to find a job specifically in the field of aging. “Grandfathered In” reflects a situation in which a participant was offered a job without having to apply for it.

Figure 1. The Journey from Initial Interest to Employment in the Field of Aging



Staying in the Field

When discussing how interested interviewees were in staying in the field of aging, the majority of those interviewed were very interested in staying in the field of aging (N=14). Passion was once again revealed through participants' reflections about their jobs and working in the field. Those who wanted to stay spoke with excitement about reaching this determination.

"I am excited and I'm optimistic that this is the type of career I'll hold for the rest of my working days." "100 percent. I want to work in this field forever". "I think I'll always be in the field of aging while I work as a professional."

One person interviewed was unsure about staying in the field or not and explained by stating,

"I think the job I currently have, it's kind of one of those decision points where, do I really want to stay in this, or is job going to give me a bad taste in my mouth just based on the organizational barriers that I've faced within this specific job".

Staying in the field but utilizing mobility and flexibility in the field of aging was also given consideration during an interview. A participant mentioned,

"I'm very interested, I love it. I definitely want to stay in it. And I just think there are so many opportunities too that you can kind of switch what you're doing while staying in the field. That's kind of cool."

Perception

Beliefs about Young Professionals

The majority of participants interviewed believed not enough young professionals are entering the field of aging (N=13).

"I do not. I think that when you look at the way the population is shifting, there is no way there's going to be enough professionals."

"No, I don't think so. I think that it is a field that is growing based off of how the population is looking and how many people we have aging. With the baby boomer generation coming and really what we view as seniors changing, that whole population change, I think that there's a need for more people to get into this field. "

Several of these professionals believed recruitment of young professionals to the field as an important issue that should be recognized and addressed accordingly. Many mentioned the continued growth of the population of older adults when voicing opinions that there are not enough young professionals entering the field and that there is going to be an increase in demand for professionals in all aspects of aging. In contrast, two persons believed there were enough young professionals entering the field of aging. One person answered with, *"Yes I would say that. And I think it's been a recent change."* Another added, *"Yeah I do, I think that especially in this region positions fill up pretty quick."* These professionals believed in the past there may not have been enough young professionals interested in working in the field of aging but now that has changed.

Advice

Many professionals interviewed mentioned that a key piece of advice for anyone wishing to become a professional in aging is networking. Networking according to participants included being in contact with established professionals already in the field who can act as a mentor or simply be able to

answer questions someone may have. *“Network. Learn what’s available in the community and connect with people who are already professionals.”* Participants identified mentoring as a resource for information when questions arise and also as a source to discuss perspectives and opinions with.

Another piece of advice for those wishing to enter the field was to volunteer in the field of aging. A participant stated, *“Volunteering is what got me interested, so I would definitely push to do volunteering at a place they think they’d not work.”* Participants noted volunteering gives the opportunity for exploration on what careers are available and to gain experience to what the field of aging has to offer. Volunteering may also help someone decide what career aspect of the aging field is appropriate for them, if it is appropriate at all. Karen talked about the aging field being unique in that it is not for everyone, *“Either you’re going to be able to do it or you’re not going to be able to do it.”* Related to volunteering is obtaining internship experience prior to a career. Several participants discussed experiencing some sort of internship before current employment. All internships were in a human services related career area, but not all were specific to aging and older adults. Internships allowed participants to gain professional experience before entering their current employment. Participants also said that internships allowed them to build skills that were directly applicable to their current jobs.

Additional advice that came from those interviewed included the topic of anticipating and being aware of the benefits for continued learning once someone obtains a career in the field. Continued learning can keep a professional up-to-date in many aspects of a career such as current research on topics relating to the job, newly identified training techniques, and important news.

Increasing Interest

The professionals interviewed all listed several ideas as to what could be done to increase interest in choosing a career in the field of aging. Participants who believed increasing interest in choosing a career in aging was a significant issue due to not enough young professionals entering the field presented more ideas about ways to increase interest when compared to participants who felt there were enough young professionals entering the field. Even with contrasting views on the number of young adults entering the field of aging, ideas to increase interest were often repeated by both groups.

Advertisement. The first theme identified by several persons was to increase advertisement and awareness of what sort of jobs the fields has. Reese stated,

“I guess also showing the broad range of opportunities that exist in the aging field and not only focusing on just the ones everyone hears or sees in the nursing home, or the senile, or the activities director, looking at the different community service programs and directorships, and larger agencies how to work with the aging network. Really highlighting the various types of jobs, that might be more attractive to younger people.”

Many participants emphasized that more people may join the field if they are aware of many job possibilities related to the field of aging beyond the usual social work, activities assistant, and so forth. Many participants also mentioned a need to increase awareness of the number of jobs available. Many participants stated that there currently exist numerous job openings in several areas of aging that need to be filled. Also related is the mentioning that more jobs will continue to be developed as the population increases. Christopher stated,

“Yeah I think you let people know that there’s a lot that are available and going to be available. And that the jobs that are available and going to be available are in a wide range of fields.”

Education. Many professionals suggested that aging-related topics and information needed to be integrated into more areas of education. This integration is not limited to classes pertaining to those in field commonly recognized to involve older adults, but into all areas. This integration would also include creation of classes on aging but also adding aging information into education as a whole. An example given by a participant of integrating aging into education would include the creation of assignments that would explore an area of study and how it relates to and affects aging and older adults. Several of those interviewed noted that aging is going to affect a wider range of career areas that many persons currently recognize and integrating aging-related education into more aspects of learning will be beneficial.

Breaking Stereotypes and Stigma. Furthermore, professionals recognize that stereotypes and stigma currently exist against the population of older adults and these negative perceptions often deter persons from considering a career in aging. Those interviewed recommended that efforts should be made to break the many existing stereotypes and stigmas associated with older adults and what working with older adults entails. Participants identifying as advocates brought up issues of stigmatization against the older adult population more often than other career categories. Examples of stereotypes mentioned included negative perceptions of older lifestyles with an emphasis on inactivity and lack of exciting and stimulating recreational activities. While working in the field of aging, participants have seen many of the older adults in their job live highly active lives, which go against existing stereotypes. Participants suggested professionals in aging and those who teach about aging need to challenge stereotypes.

Attraction

Making Aging “Cool.” Issues with attracting young professionals to the field of aging were brought up by participants. An interesting point was made by two participants who noted that the field of aging is not a “sexy” career field. This idea demonstrates the problem that many younger professionals may be more inclined to join a field that has a more exciting and attractive representation. Laney brought up the example of the Susan. G. Komen breast

cancer nonprofit and how the marketing used made breast cancer “cool” as in it is now more mainstream and more accepted as a topic. Laney thinks this marketing concept is applicable to issues in aging.

Increase Comfort with Death and Dying. Related to attracting persons was a fear of death and dying being a deterrent from working with older adults. Many persons mentioned that society as a whole ignores the ideal of death and dying, which translates over to the ignorance of older adults. One person stated, *“And I think that a lot of times people are nervous about the fact that death and dying has a lot to do with geriatrics....”* Another commented about death as a part of working in aging. *“It’s rewarding, you just need to be prepared for death. As long as you can handle that, it’s a great field.”* Participants that discussed death and dying being a part of their job seemed to be very comfortable with the subject matter and wish that more persons were comfortable with discussing it.

Job Security

A small number of participants’ indicated that the field of aging is a field that has an element of job security to it. Linda said that, *“you’ve got a career guaranteed for life. Even if you change jobs, the field of aging is a pretty solid career to always have an opportunity.”* Laney suggested one way to make the field of aging more attractive is to advertise job security to even middle school and high school students, *“I think that if we educate the younger folks in middle school and high school that this is going to be a growing field, that that will*

interest them that it's job security." The idea of advertising job security was brought up to be an important idea as a result of current economic hardships and unemployment problems in the workforce. The attitude for advertising the field of aging to have job security was discussed as a preventative measure against unemployment and tough economic issues.

Summary

The professionals interviewed identified their job to match certain career categories but noted those categories fluctuate. Professionals attributed initial interest in pursuing a career in the aging field to exposure to aging family members, parental career influence, discovery of the field during college, and discovery of a career in aging during a search for employment. Education levels of professionals interviewed ranged from a high school diploma to a master's degree with degrees across various disciplines. Participants differed in their current stage of their career in aging. Some participants were in their first career, others had been in the field for a while, and some had returned to the field after leaving to pursue other fields. The majority of participants took steps to be prepared for the workforce through education, volunteering, or internships.

The majority of professionals interviewed want to stay in the field of aging. The majority also believes more young professionals need to enter the field of aging. Professionals identified several ways to increase interest in

choosing a career in aging such as increasing awareness of the types of jobs available and the number of jobs that are available. Passion was shown through the eagerness and excitement displayed by participants when giving ideas to recruit more professionals to the field.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter considers the results in light of prior research. Limitations of the study and implications for research and practice will be discussed.

Summary of Results

Professionals interviewed varied in many different aspects, including what initially inspired them to choose a career in the field of aging, educational background, and stage of career path. Most identified as wanting to stay in the field and believed there are not enough young professionals entering the field to keep up with the growing number of older adults. Those interviewed recommended networking with professionals in the field, volunteering, obtaining internships, and continued education once in the field to anyone who wants to become a professional in the field of aging. Professionals stated that increasing awareness of the variety of jobs in aging, the number of jobs currently available and the predicted growth of job numbers in aging may help to increase interest in choosing a career in aging. Professionals also suggested increasing aging related subject matter in educational settings and breaking perceived stereotypes and stigma against older adults and careers in aging may also help increase interest. Increasing aging-related information in educational settings could occur at colleges and universities. Colleges and universities may be able to

revise course content to include information on aging and older adults that relates to each discipline. Additional course offerings could also be created that educate students about aging topics. Participants also indicated the field to have a sense of job security.

Discussion of Results

The career paths of professionals interviewed were varied when comparing initial interest, work experience, and educational backgrounds. The lack of similarity across educational and career paths may indicate there is not a need for more standardized pathways to becoming a professional in aging which differs from the idea regarding the field of aging needing further standardization across jobs and education in gerontology (Grabinski, 2007). At the same time, participants discussed the need for high schools, colleges, and universities to educate students about careers in aging and how to obtain the needed preparation to obtain employment.

Education for professionals interviewed came from a variety of disciplines, but mostly social work. The differentiating educational degrees demonstrate that not all professionals in aging were specifically trained to work in the field of aging, but not being specifically trained to work in the field of aging also does not mean they are not qualified to do their job. A variety of educational backgrounds and disciplines confirm the idea from AGHE (2014) about the field of gerontology containing professionals from a diverse array of disciplines.

Different careers in aging require different training and that training can come from discipline areas outside of those usually associated with aging such as social work.

The majority of professionals interviewed agreed that there is an issue with the number of available workers for jobs in the field of aging versus the number of opening. Most participants' identified a deficit of young professionals filling the jobs needed to keep up with demand for qualified workers in aging, which confirms Eshbaugh et al. (2010) discussion about a need for knowledgeable workers in aging. The majority of professionals interviewed wanted to stay in the field. With the already noticeable lack of persons interested in working the field, retention of the persons currently working in the field is important.

Many participants talked about the variety of possible careers in the field of aging beyond the typical careers that are seen. Discussion of possible careers in aging confirms the idea from Eshbaugh et al. (2010) that future careers in aging will not be limited to "obvious aging careers" (p. 327). Examples of not-so-obvious careers in aging may include clothing design, elder law, audiology, gerotechnology, event planning, and interior design (Grabinski, 2007).

Stereotypes and stigma about older adults and careers in aging were mentioned to be possible inhibitors to attracting young professionals. These ideas mentioned by professionals confirm Robert and Mosher-Ashley (2000)

who noted student interest in aging careers would likely be less if they had a negative perception of working with older adults.

This present study extends current literature by adding two ideas for increasing interest in choosing a career in aging. One idea is that participants identified the field of aging to offer a chance for flexibility and mobility between jobs for professionals. Flexibility and mobility might be traits that could be an attractive quality for those considering this field for a career. A second idea is to integrate education about aging and older adults into all disciplines. Many participants discussed aging and how it will be impacted across many disciplines.

The professionals interviewed confirmed prior research results and also contributed new ideas about careers in aging. Moreover, this study sought out young professionals to bring attention to a mostly under-recognized group and to give the young professionals in this group an opportunity to contribute their ideas and voice their opinions. Listening to this group is important because the field of aging is in the midst of many changes. Young professionals in aging will be shaping the future of the field in the coming years as changes continue to occur and the older adult population increases. Gaining the perspective from those young professionals who are already in the field also brings additional perspectives on a looming workforce problem.

Limitations

Sample

The results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of younger professionals working in the field of aging. The participants in this study are only a slice of those who are young professionals working in the field of aging. The participants in this study were all very excited and happy in the field of aging. It is likely that there are people who are younger professionals in aging who are not happy in the field.

The study has limited representation of professionals in aging who identify as researchers and conduct research in the field of aging. In addition, the sample size was relatively small. Additional participants may have yielded different results and additional points to be made. Most participants interviewed also identified as being white females. Further diversity among participants in terms of gender and ethnicity may have brought different perspectives.

Recruitment

Recruitment was completed through two listserv e-mail systems, distribution of 50 handouts, word-of-mouth, approaching persons through professional contexts, distributing materials to professionals known to the researchers, requesting agencies distribute information, and contacting professionals via publicly available sources (i.e., on a government or university website). Opening up the recruitment to a national level rather than a regional

level may have allowed for greater representation for all job categories and additional participants.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

With this sample, all participants seemed to be satisfied in their job and career path. A suggested direction for future research would be to investigate perceptions of satisfaction and happiness in persons working in the field of aging. Furthermore, a study could be designed to compare levels of satisfaction and happiness in employment in the field of aging across the seven categories of careers in aging.

Another research study may include a longitudinal study that follows careers of professionals in aging over a period of time. An additional idea for future research would be to design a study to measure the effectiveness of the participants' ideas to increase interest in choosing a career in aging.

This study had participants who were mostly white females. Future research may be conducted to focus on diversity in careers in aging in terms of race/ethnicity and gender. If a need is identified to increase diversity among professionals in careers in aging, an investigation on ways to increase diversity in the workforce in the field of aging may be also be helpful.

Information produced may be used to design a campaign to increase awareness careers in aging. The campaign would be able to promote the need for younger professionals in aging and that many avenues exist which may bring

someone into a career in aging. Another idea would be for college and university career counselors and high school guidance counselors to take the results of this study and inform persons who are at a point to make a decision of where to direct their career interests. Presenting the study information to persons investigating potential career paths may influence choices towards a career in aging.

Summary

The study confirmed prior research but also brought forth new ideas on careers in aging. A new idea brought forth was that the field of aging has flexibility and mobility which may allow workers to move among various positions, while remaining in the same field. Flexibility and mobility were also identified as possible qualities that may be attractive to younger professionals. Another new idea was that information about aging and older adults needs to be further integrated into more educational settings and disciplines to increase awareness and exposure of the field of aging. Finally, participants suggested “making aging cool.”

Limitations for the study included sample size, diversity in the participants regarding gender and race/ethnicity, and satisfaction in current job. Suggested future research includes exploring job satisfaction among professionals in aging, focusing aging career research on males, and investigating diversity among professionals in aging. Information for this study

may be used for career guidance and campaigns to increase awareness of careers in aging.

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Appendix A

HSIRB Approval

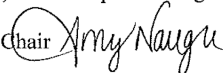
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: February 13, 2015

To: Karen Blaisure, Principal Investigator
 Paul Cunnington, Student Investigator for thesis
 Janet Hahn, Co-Principal Investigator
 Angel Gullon-Rivera, Co-Principal Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-02-17

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Careers of Aging: Increasing Interest and Investigating Career Paths" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 12, 2016

Appendix B

Face to Face Script

Hello,

My name is Paul Cunnington and I am a graduate student from the Family and Consumer Sciences department at Western Michigan University. I am currently looking for potential participants to participate in my research study on what young professionals believe about increasing interest in choosing a career in the field of aging. The study will also look at the career paths of young professionals in aging. Are you interested in hearing more information about being a potential participant in the study? (Y/N)

(If yes, move on in script. If no, thank them for their time)

Potential participants shall be between the ages of 22 and 35. The participants involved with this research project shall be professionals in the field of aging who work as one or more of the following career categories: Advocates, direct service providers, educators/trainers, managers/administrators, marketers and product developers, program planners and evaluators, and researchers.

The interview shall include questions about educational background, career path, interest in the field of aging, and increasing interest for careers in aging. The interview audio shall be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. All participants will be placed into a random drawing to win a \$25 visa gift card.

Are you potentially interested in participating in this study or do you know of someone who may be interested in participating?

(If interested, move to consent document to give further details.)

(If they know of a potential participant give them contact info and copy of handout)

If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at paul.s.cunnington@wmich.edu or 517-526-3978.

Thank you very much for your time.

E-mail and handout template

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Paul Cunnington and I am a graduate student from the Family and Consumer Sciences department at Western Michigan University. I am currently looking for potential participants to participate in my research study on what young professionals believe about increasing interest in choosing a career in the field of aging. The study will also look at the career paths of young professionals in aging.

Potential participants shall be between the ages of 22 and 35. The participants involved with this research project shall be professionals in the field of aging who work as one or more of the following career categories:

- Advocates
- Direct service providers
- Educators/trainers
- Managers/administrators
- Marketers and product developers
- Program planners and evaluators
- Researchers

The interview shall include questions about educational background, career path, interest in the field of aging, and increasing interest for careers in aging. The interview audio shall be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. All participants will be placed into a random drawing to win a \$25 visa gift card.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at paul.s.cunnington@wmich.edu or 517-526-3978.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Paul Cunnington

Appendix C

Interview Script

Introduction

Hello and thank you for meeting with me today. Before we begin, I would like you to read through the consent document provided. I will then answer any questions you have before we begin.

Do you have any questions regarding the consent document or anything regarding the interview?

(If yes, answer questions and then state) If you would like to participate in this study, please sign the document.

(If no, state) If you would like to participate in this study, please sign the document.

As a reminder, if at any time you experience significant discomfort or distress and need assistance, a resource list can be provided. You will be responsible for the cost of any care that you may choose to seek.

(Once the person signs the document). I will turn on the audio recording now.

[INTERVIEW]

Instrumentation

1. How and when did you become interested in the field of aging?
2. Describe the career path taken to where you are today.
3. What do you do as a(n) [*career category pertaining to participant*]?
4. Describe your educational background.
5. Do you believe your education prepared you for this job? If not, what education/training do you wish you had?

6. Do you believe the aging field has enough young professionals entering? Explain?
7. How interested are you in staying in the field of aging?
8. What advice do you have for becoming a professional in aging?
9. What do you believe can be done to increase interest in choosing a career in the field of aging/gerontology?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your race/ethnicity?
4. What is your job title?

Follow-up Interview Questions

Can you please elaborate about....

I'm not sure I understand, could you tell me more about...

Could you please tell me more about...

You just told me about... I'd also like to know more about

Do you have anything else you would like to add before ending the interview?

Closing

Thank you very much for your participation. Do you have any further questions regarding the interview? [*Answer questions if there are any*]. If after this interview you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at paul.s.cunnington@wmich.edu.

Appendix D
Resource List

Resources

Center for Counseling and Psychological Services

Western Michigan University
<http://www.wmich.edu/cecp/ccps>
(269) 387-5105

National Career Development Association

http://associationdatabase.com/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/consumer_find

American Psychological Association

<http://locator.apa.org/>

American Counseling Association

<http://www.counseling.org/learn-about-counseling/what-is-counseling>