



THE AGING SELF: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS ON GENERATIONAL LESSON SHARING AND EMBODIMENT EXPRESSIONS OF OLDER ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study captures individual aging experiences, gaining insight into how older adults understand aging bodies and express age. Three main research questions were developed to respond to that inquiry: (1) How do older adults embody aging? (2) What life lessons are embedded in these expressions of age? And (3) What life lessons are beneficial for younger generations to know for their own aging experiences? The study employed a secondary data analysis of semi-structured interviews, initially completed without restrictions on age, identity, or experience for participant inclusion. Results were analyzed using NVivo software with a constructive narrative analysis focus. Narratives were grouped into three categories based on the time frame central to the interview: past, present, or future. Emerging narratives included being a student, worker, partner in marriage, parent, retiree, and immigrant. The findings demonstrate how different embodiment experiences emerge through reflective narrative construction and influenced lessons shared. These conclusions contribute to understanding how choices and experiences at different stages in the life course can influence the aging experience and how it is projected. Ultimately, the findings emphasize the role that the self and body hold on identity and self-expression for older adults.

INTRODUCTION

In a simplistic sense, aging has been defined as the aspects of individual loss and impaired function that continue on a decline until death.¹ As these developments occur, the body's awareness and perceptions of the changes influence actions taken and overall aging experiences.² With continued expectations of an expanding aging population into

2050,¹ many academics have begun to describe aging experiences beyond biology by focusing on the body and brain simultaneously.³ Literature is moving towards a humanistic approach and studying aspects of *individual lives* due to prominent non-biomedical influences such as cultural norms and stereotypes.⁴⁻⁶

However, within lifespan and aging research,⁷⁻⁹ *embodiment* has emerged as a quasi-developed theme to better explain how individuals understand, absorb, and then express aging beliefs. In general, embodiment considers the three-fold interaction of cognitive function, the physical body, and the environment to make connections about situational outcomes in domains such as language, memory, attention, and action.⁹ In practice, embodiment studies tend to be interested in how perceived abilities, motor skills, and cognition interact and impact routine activities such as peer interactions, throughout human development.²

Henceforth, the study's goal is to examine the embodiment of aging through the construction of life story narratives to illuminate individual older adult experiences. The research aims to capture aging realities and any cognitive, bodily, or social developments that impact an individual's self-perception of age. With health promotion of older adults primarily focused on dieting, exercise, and therapies,¹ this research aims to provide additional, meaningful evidence focused specifically on *experiences* of aging rather than on identifying suggestions for behaviour change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EMBODIMENT

The term *embodiment* focuses on occurrences within the body,⁶ as well as how the physical body is used to access the world and its surroundings.⁷ Embodiment research, such as Bury's 1982 study, has explored illness experiences like Rheumatoid Arthritis and the impact of progressive symptoms to understand how individuals grasp biological changes.⁶ The conclusions found that in males, body perceptions and functionality influence how age is individually understood and then performed externally.⁶ Similarly, Dumas et al.⁴ conducted an empirical study on older women's perceptions that showed similar embodiment phenomena. Across participants, regardless of social differences such as socioeconomic status, results showed that the value linked to bodies changes with age⁴. Some participants replaced younger beauty norms, such as dying hair,

with ones that matched their aging bodies.⁴ The findings emphasized a lower daily interest in appearance over time, as the participants adopted a more relaxed approach in social life.⁴ Moreover, the concept of subjective age aligns with embodiment as aging identity is paired with group-assigned social roles.⁵ Monumental life changes such as retirement or losing a spouse also impact a subjective or perceived age, decided upon by the individual.⁵

SOCIAL IMPACT

Even more, the social aspects of aging have become another profound focus in gerontology studies.^{4,10} Research has drawn on identities, societal barriers, changes with social roles, connection-making, and accessing support in social environments to address the social impacts.¹¹

In studying Arab immigrant women, Salma et al. demonstrate how a lack of access to social supports impact an individual's perceived ability to overcome barriers.¹¹ These barriers often determine life satisfaction.¹¹ In addition, a lack of social contact and connection leads to social isolation and loneliness, resulting in reports of overall low aging satisfaction.⁵

Notably, the social life of older adults is largely shaped by the relationships in their immediate social circles, often with family, friends, and romantic partners.¹² Research on family resilience in later life has provided evidence of the role of coupled and intergenerational relationships.¹² Other influential socio-emotional bonds include community connections for older adults.¹² In addition to individually motivated acts of socialization, macro-level sociocultural norms like beauty and justice^{4,13} also contribute to embodiment. Researching intolerance of age prejudice through social norms, Vauclair and colleagues identify the impact of these broader concepts of activism and morality.¹³ Their findings reported statistical significance through the impact of emotions on age perceptions.¹³

Evidently, societies with a greater emphasis on ability-based social norms, such as conflict resolution, rather than chronological age, are better equipped to

recognize the talents and essence of all the population.¹⁴ This distinction creates a more supportive aging environment.¹⁴

GENERATIONAL RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING

In addition to social elements of aging, research has also extended to more generational-based thinking that includes both the younger and older individuals' perspectives and wisdom.¹⁰ With generational studies, there is often a familial or relational connection between participants and administrators.¹⁰ The designs encourage a storytelling style, in attempt to further these bonds.¹⁰ Therefore, storytelling with older adults *and* younger researchers provides the optimal opportunity for communication between individuals who both may be experiencing isolation and could benefit from structured social moments.¹⁵

Furthermore, aging research has developed many useful theories to explain how revisiting the past and speaking to current experiences develops an aging identity. Continuity Theory, developed by Robert Atchley in 1989, can assist in explaining the value of reviewing life stories.¹⁰ Doing so impacts an individual's conceptualization of identity even through ability changes.¹⁰ Continuity Theory presents that middle-aged and older adults try to *maintain* internal and external structures by using past experiences and social circumstances to hold onto an evolving identity.¹⁶ Naturally, Continuity Theory acts as a guiding tool in aging studies by encouraging older adults to share experiences in research that simultaneously promote embracing identity.

Additionally, Socioemotional Selectivity Theory assists in explaining how older adults tend to recount memories through a more positive lens than younger individuals.¹⁰ This theory, developed by Laura L. Carstensen, consider the whole lifespan, claiming that specific goals are motivators in social actions throughout the life course, regardless of age.¹⁷ The 1995 foundational paper considers how life review and storytelling can be methods for emotional regulation.¹⁰ As well, older adults can continue

building social connections within specific age cohorts and those younger through sharing stories.¹⁰ The use of this theory aids in creating an inclusive and more personal research experience by thinking of behaviour as social choices and the life story holistically, as opposed to linearly.¹⁷

LIFE LESSONS

In addition to life course review, *life lessons* about aging can indicate an older adult's subjective age. Subjective age entails an individual's perceived age primarily based on their feelings.⁵ Additionally, the subjective age is based off comparisons to other figures who hold similar characteristics to the person.⁵ With this self-constructed age, embodiment experiences are expressed through lessons that culminate participants memories and wishes for the future with a clear sense of how they see themselves. By sharing, older adults savour the lessons learned *because of aging*. Participants in reflective studies often realize the privilege of getting older, shifting to a positive view that inadvertently enhances well-being.¹⁸

AIMS

Considering the literature on aging, the proposed research questions are "How do older adults embody aging" and "What life lessons are embedded in these expressions of age?" to further understand these unique experiences. Additionally, "What life lessons are beneficial for younger generations to know for their own aging experiences?" will be used to assist in differentiating life experiences from life lessons in the analysis process. This question will assist in identifying key teachable moments. Considering the multi-structured design of the three primary questions, the thesis, therefore, has two distinct aims: to gain a deeper understanding of personal aging experiences *and* to adequately depict how older adults' realities can inform aging outcomes into the future.

METHODS

QUALITATIVE DESIGN SELECTION

Qualitative approaches in social gerontology, specifically, have been integral to learning more about vulnerable and marginalized individuals on topics such as retirement processes, relationships and sexuality in older age, and independent living.¹⁹ Therefore, a qualitative design was chosen for this study to best reflect the research goals of studying embodiment and life experiences through a sociology-influenced lens.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

To start, this study employed secondary data analysis of interview transcripts collected from 'HLTH 352: Sociology of Aging' students at the University of Waterloo. Permission was granted from the Office of Research Ethics to work on Dr. Elena Neiterman's existing study (ORE #: 41501).

SAMPLE

Next, transcripts were read and analyzed to find emerging narratives from a collection of the interviews. The final sample of 25 was selected based on the criteria that clear and direct answers were provided to conduct analysis with clarity and authenticity. The transcript selection process had no inclusion or exclusion criteria based on age, sex, demographics, or experiences. Moreover, the sample represented participants from a broad age range: 55-95 years old, 17 identifying as female, eight males, and 13 as immigrants to Canada with varying cultural backgrounds.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Following the sample selection, the texts were analyzed using a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. This process was largely influenced by techniques of narrative analysis as it encourages viewing texts holistically.¹⁹ At length, the narrative analysis work began with listing themes or prominent narratives that emerged, consisting of: Age and Gender Perceptions, Education, Embodiment, Family and Friends, Generational Differences, Immigration, Leisure, Lessons, and

Work-Life. Each transcript was coded with nodes named after each theme, for important information or details that contributed to constructing a narrative and expressing aging embodiment.

Further, each highlighted quote was analyzed in a list to identify the variation across transcripts for every theme and narrative. Doing so showed how a similar experience, like immigration, could differ in its construction and expression between participants. In conclusion, amongst the unique transcripts, three predominant time frames were the focus. The distinctions were made clear through repeat mentions of similar phenomena or milestones set either in the past, present, or future.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to transcript receipt, most names and identifying information were already removed, but any references in the "Results" and "Discussion" sections to participants were generalized and did not mention geographical locations or identifiers such as places of work or frequency. Additionally, the author's role as a student researcher was to ensure equity in academic research. Selecting a narrative analysis technique assisted in focusing on each transcript in a singular sense and not generalizing older adults into a collective. In summary, ethical considerations consisted of a conscious effort to keep data anonymous and to fully credit the diverse narratives by exploring them as individual experiences.

RESULTS

GENERAL

The findings represent the 17 female- and eight male-identifying participants, who are 55-95 years old and of varying nationalities, with 13 being immigrants to Canada. As participants shared life course experiences, conversations focused on monumental events, expressing aging embodiment, and potential lessons. Narratives included: Age and Gender Perceptions, Education, Embodiment, Family and Friends, Generational Differences, Immigration, Leisure, Lessons, and Work-Life.

PAST

Narratives that emphasized the role of the past were integral to identity development and were regarded fondly and with limited regret. A dominant narrative of the past focused on the immigrant experience from those who moved to Canada. Content primarily had to do with the roles of education, career choices, and family dynamics that were impacted by immigration. An 85-year-old immigrant who fled Ukraine at age 14, post-WW2, explained the challenges of adjusting to a country with increased stability compared to the participant's prior residence, in the following way:

Yes, yes, there was a definite period of adjustment when we first came over, and I've . . . and it was solely due to our experiences. These people here seemed . . . carefree, almost worry-free, they didn't- didn't . . . stew about little things. We were always, always . . . as if, we were more serious, we could not understand the frivolous things that some people, some kids our age would do, and . . . so- so we, well we simply wouldn't do that, no. We seemed more mature; I think.

The participant reflected on the continuous influence of past events, through noting the memorable differences between non-immigrants and immigrants in attitude and expressions.

Like immigrant narratives, some participants focused on specific ages or stages in the life course that were significant. Referencing an exact number, or a time in older adulthood, a participant stated that their actual age is known, but they currently feel much younger. Explaining their age as if they are still in a different era of their life. A 60-year-old participant who lives with their husband and two children explained:

Actually, I . . . still feel I can function normally because you know aging is just a number, seriously, you know? You don't feel like you age like every day you wake up with the same thing and nobody feels the aging. You know, I never feel I am 60 now. I still feel that I am at the university.

Participants, like so, acknowledged and appreciated the body, without overemphasizing the role of aging. Through references to the past, their actual age and the state of the participants bodies were explained as

something unnoticeable. Interviews that highlighted youthfulness in older adulthood, had participants that tended to compare the current state of the body to one of the past. The past state was often one that has remained important and influential to their later life. As well, milestones such as attending higher education or transitional points in careers in the past were frequent areas of focus.

Furthermore, past-focused participants were able to explain that individual situations are not universal aging experience and that there are differences amongst cohorts. These differences were commonly referenced in the coding of Generational Differences and Age and Gender Perceptions. To this end, a participant focused primarily on how aging experiences, collectively, are ameliorated because of medical advancements and more gerontological studies. The participant is a 62-year-old widowed male, retired, living in a retirement home, and vocalized that there have been major improvements:

I think [aging experiences are] definitely easier because medical science has made it easier; the drugs are better to help the aches and pains and just the fact that [aging] is understood (..) again, there are a lot of people (..) the size of the aging population is so large that we have all learned a lot. [It] may be because of [studies] like this that are studying these kinds of things and can tell people that this is what the average person is going through and I think the understanding of aging is a lot better these days.

The participant observed similar experiences within older adult cohorts and addressed how these have changed.

The marriage narrative was another key milestone of the past with long-term impacts. A few participants mentioned how aging with a partner can influence health status in older age. They shared that: "I age very healthy because [of] your partner you know. If your partner is good, you age really good. But like if your partner is bad, you age really fast. If you have a bad partner, aging will be so quick." This participant expressed that marriage created a positive age trajectory for them through the support of a partner.

Within these dominant narratives, other major life transitions had a noticeable influence on the construction and presentation of the past body. Key events included starting a family and raising children, beginnings and advancements in careers, and historical and cultural events such as war.

PRESENT

The second narrative category focused on the present state in the participants interviews. Conversations demonstrated the construction of present-based narratives primarily through focusing on leisure, daily life, and recent physical changes to the body. Many participants spoke about involvement in volunteer work, hobbies developed in retirement, and managing aging selves.

Firstly, as an emerging focus in the interviews, Embodiment was dominantly coded and communicated through expressions that aging is a natural process and not a progression to dwell on. Participants spoke directly about how aging is not a special development, so the focus of getting older should be on the growth of the person and the soul. Embodiment experiences were vocalized like so:

The differences include how aging is viewed in our societies (..) when I was younger in Iran, older people were very respected (..) because it is expected in Iranian culture. Getting older was never seen as something amazing, but as a natural part of our lives (...) the soul is what is most important (..) and we must try to be as good as we can be to have a good soul.

Participants, like the 82-year-old immigrant who lives alone, vocalized an understanding that aging is inevitable. Most participants, however, were experiencing minimal first-hand deficits such as physical, cognitive, or social changes.

Similarly, a widowed 78-year-old participant, who worked as a nurse shared that; “For me it was a natural progression. You know, you become an adult, you work, you retire, you get old.” Their experience mirrored other participants’ who were also not bothered by their aging bodies, explaining that these changes are the next step in an inevitable cycle.

While the consensus of aging expressions was mostly positive, as mentioned, there were a select few that highlighted personal downfalls with getting older. These aging critiques included the inability to perform quintessential tasks unattended and without difficulty. A participant is 95 years old, situated in long term care, and living with Multiple Sclerosis. They addressed how the physical body affects their functional abilities. The participant shared; “But I have . . . MS (..) very (...) It’s called slowly progressive so (..) it affects my (...) mobility (...) And old age affects everything else.” For this older adult, a decrease in abilities such as mobility and independence influenced perceptions and their mindset towards aging.

The mentions of physical, cognitive, and social decline mostly appeared as references to aging friends and family. A female participant, who is active on councils in their senior’s complex, demonstrates how utilizing aging figures as a comparison point can influence self-understandings and expressions of age. The older adult referenced other aging individuals in the same building when expressing their youthful mindset. To explain how their body’s challenges do not make them feel old, they shared that: “Personally, I’m in better health than a lot of them. I don’t feel old. I do not feel old. I know I look old, I have aches and pains and problems walking, but I don’t feel old. I want to keep living and keep doing the things I’m doing and helping people.” Like the narrative that compared other aging figures, this participant uses other older adults’ aging progression to model their conceptions of age. Other past-based participants were able to describe events such as health issues that have impacted the physical body. These conversations included comparisons of current states to other older adults, explaining that personal declines in abilities have not impacted them as severely as their peers.

Furthermore, the influence of the present body on the construction of aging narratives is shown through a participant who has seen a decrease in physical capabilities. This participant is 79 years old and experiencing vision loss. The older adult shared that: “It’s the feeling of being made to depend on others. I

can't do simple things like dial the phone or going out for a walk on my own or drive. That's the hardest part. Losing the independence." These sentiments towards aging embodiment were largely influenced by an independent lifestyle as a hardworking businessperson and the changes that have occurred since retirement. Another participant explains the steps taken in aging and refers to their upbringing as occurring during the "Dark Ages" as a comedic way to define the age difference. The participant shared how they have embodied aging as something to be dealt with not dwelled upon and shared the following advice:

Just keep a positive attitude. When the aches and pains come, deal with them, if they can be looked after, take care of them. Take care of yourself, stay healthy, stay involved, become interested in what's going on in the world and maybe even get involved in politics, oh that's not a good one, but get interested in volunteering.

Each aging experience was marked by different circumstances in personal narratives that resulted in a stance or mentality of aging that represented who the participants are now and how the body has experienced the progression of getting older.

Further, participants talked about the values they hold, using present experiences to answer questions about guidance and what is important in life for aging. This narrative commonly emerged as a leisure-based theme, where older adults used present bodies and increased time to do meaningful tasks. A 73-year-old participant grew up in a family dedicated to learning about cultures. The older adult developed a passion for travelling and shared about the importance of fun, regardless of age:

Having fun. That's I think really important in every lifespan. In every lifespan. Having fun, the-or enjoying life . . . either for yourself, depending, you know what

your personality is, or with friends or family. But having fun is so, so important. It will, you know, renew your life and your outlook and everything, and . . . from there, you gain new energy to do other good thing

A 79-year-old East Asian immigrant shared about the value in learning as there are more options for education and professions now. This narrative represents the learner; older adults who value education for themselves and younger generations. The participant expressed that; "I like to improve knowledge of the world every day. I like to be conversing about what is happening in the world

and just listening to the commentaries, listening to radio and (..) tv and keep up to date with the world." This older adult values knowledge and is passionate about growing understandings of worldly events. The participant expressed that age will not stop any interest they have in learning.

Notably, many older adult retirees are using increased personal time to find information-sharing leisure activities to continue growing and learning with age.

Next, participants separated changes to aging bodies from changes to mental states and attitudes. Some older adults spoke about the necessity to care for the body as it ages but to not let this need dominate

emotions. Involvement in volunteering and community activities were prominent suggestions for younger adults as they grow, to encourage social and cultural awareness. A 65-year-old participant who is currently working as a nurse explained their philosophy of acceptance:

I think just accept every aspect of what happens, like every, you're going to get older I wouldn't worry about it. I would just make sure that you know, you would, you were aging as well as you could and just keep being



well-rounded like keep having interest. Keep doing the things you love and just be open for all the new experiences.

In expressing aging embodiment, many participants had a similar mentality of aging with the body, not against it. By accepting the changes that may come with age, some participants were able to continue living and growing without making aging a full-time focus, even when feeling the impacts of aging.

Some of the narratives that were present-focused were the Retirement, Work-Life, Education, and Leisure codes. Many older adults' embodiment experiences influenced expressions in older adulthood and the lessons they deemed important during interviews.

FUTURE

Results depicted conversations about Lessons or advice, Embodiment, and how bodies will evolve in the future. A few participants also expressed Generational Differences between student interviewers and themselves to solidify how future change is possible when considering the progress made historically.

A narrative that was future-based focused a lot on the importance of Education as a tool to later life success. While education and learning were also relevant in present narratives, when expressed from a future stance, the narrative was constructed more as a lesson or recommendation for younger generations to pursue. A 73-year-old, retired teacher and graduate studies counselor illustrates the common recurrence of how important education is in the life course. Many participants shared the repeated lesson of being dedicated to student life:

WELL, what I would definitely . . . say, get an excellent education. Often (..) a goal in the North American conte- context. People made it big without (..) the highest education, but I'm still of an old-fashioned . . . maybe attitude that education- good education will always be a good base for your career. AND THEN network, network, network.

Education was highlighted as a useful way to help

certain career paths and is important for identity development. A few older adults provided advice to pursue higher education or continue to learn in daily life in creative ways.

Following that future narrative, a 75-year-old was forced out of retirement by the 2008 market crash and had returned to work and volunteering at the time of the interview. The Work-Life narrative was prominent in those who were passionate about the career they had, if they were not retired, or like this participant, required to return to work to support themselves financially. The working older adult shared that: "Looking as a young person ahead, you have to be aware that the career choice that you are going to making are going to be more complex, and many MORE then when I was your age. Life was more simpler, in terms of choices available to you."

For them, by not considering the possibility of having to come out of retirement, the return to the workforce came as a shock. Therefore, the future guidance is to think ahead, especially as it relates to careers. Some participants advised the interviewers to be cognizant and always aware of what could be next. The lessons to the student interviewers were primarily to be ready and to plan because of the constant and unpredictable changes in work and life in general.

The Work-Life narrative emerged again with a participant who is 55 years old and still working to manage continuous and increasing expenses. They are hopeful that retirement is in the near future and shared this advice:

I think that you always need to think about the future. (..) there are so many issues in the world right now, and even a small mistake can change your life (..) when making decisions you should always consult older people as they have experienced this already and will give you good advice.

Participants, like this worker, used explanations of the past and present to guide conversations about what needs to happen in the coming years, through anecdotes. As a 55-year-old, this narrative and perspective of working into older adulthood may differ drastically from a retired older participants'

stance and past experiences in the workforce. Each narrative, regardless of age, contains valuable wisdom and guidance about how aging can evolve and what steps younger generations can take to ameliorate aging experiences.

While three distinct narratives emerged based on similar coding of node collections, there is also, notably, narrative cross-over. Each mindset: past, present, and future often collided when explaining embodiment experiences. Participants referenced events or sentiments of the past, the impact now, and what will happen in the future as the body continues to age. The construction of narratives showed the interwovenness of life course narratives and expressions of aging embodiment.

DISCUSSION

GENERAL

Overall, the findings focused on aging experiences through the construction of events that have occurred to the body and mind. These memories impacted expressions and sentiments towards older adulthood. The semi-structured nature of the interviews and small sample size allowed for personal questions and focused on each participant's story, as a unique piece in illuminating older adult lives. Therefore, most participants spoke directly about individualistic emotions or sentiments towards aging and did not rely on generalizations about age cohorts or aging stereotypes to amplify experiences. Each transcript represented an individualistic experience of aging and illustrated the significance of childhood, adulthood, and older adult embodiment on expressions of age. There was, however, a lot of crossover and continuity in the narratives as participants reflected upon similar milestones.

PAST

In past-based results, prominent narratives included being a student, worker, marriage partner, and immigrant. Many of these narratives appeared paired or combined with another narrative, if they somehow affected each other or co-existed such as immigration and work life. Participants who immigrated were

often also very family-focused and dove into the narratives of being a parent or spouse and the role that played into the immigration experience. The construction of some immigrant narratives was rooted in early life experiences of turmoil and change before immigrating to Canada. In growing up with restrictions and limited luxuries, moving to a more liberated and leisure-encouraging country was not only a change in the physical environment but a lifestyle adjustment as well. Narratives that emphasized childhood or young adult struggle, demonstrated how immigration can impact the self and choices through increased freedoms. Immigrant experiences were seen to be a continuous narrative as their impacts were present in various life transitions. Further, participants who had an embodiment experience of youthfulness tended to have a more positive mental stance on the overall aging experience. This unique embodiment experience demonstrates that age is subjective to the body and mind of the individual who is either aware of the changes or chooses not to be defined by them. Additionally, the statement of how aging progresses based on relationships reinforces how past choices can have ongoing influence and meaning.

As a collective, past narratives provide insight into how major life changes in tandem with bodily changes hold personal value as older adults reflected on these events. Past-based narratives demonstrate Continuity Theory as participants reviewed life stories and drew connections on how their identity and body have been shaped due to specific experiences such as moving and the lifestyle changes that followed suit. The narratives of the past: immigration, youthfulness, and marriage, represent how embodiment is influenced by previous experiences that shape internalizations and expressions of age.

PRESENT

In present-based narratives, most older adults vocalized the aging journey positively by stating that aging is unavoidable and should be embraced for satisfaction in later years, especially as it is uncontrollable. Present selves were marked by aging

bodies at the time of interviews and many participants spoke about current selves optimistically, focusing on what they are doing, not on what they cannot do now or may not be able to do in the future. With retirees, there was more time for families, volunteer work, and finding hobbies of interest. These interests demonstrate the contributions older adults make to society post-work life. Narratives like this demonstrate the interconnectedness of embodiment of aging and how dynamic narratives provide varying levels of meaning and impact that are then expressed differently. These narratives align with the principles of Socioemotional Selectivity Theory through displays of positive reflection of the past and an ability to see how prior experiences shaped the present by having concrete discussions on emotion.

The narrative of acceptance contrasted to past-based interviews where some older adults expressed feeling young. These youthful thinkers utilized moments or phenomena to put their aging selves in a younger position. For the participants who were seemingly untouched by the impact of the present aging bodies, embodiment expressions were more focused on the continuity of life and being present, active beings. However, when negative aging experiences were presented, they mostly were perceptions developed from spouses and having to transition into the caregiver role or seeing friends and family struggle with age, not personal bodily experiences. If referencing other older adults' experiences with physical ability changes, alterations to activities of daily life were vocalized as a major adjustment and made the participants, who were reflecting, grateful for the state of present aging selves. Notably, it is the physical body itself that acts as the influence into aging perceptions, guiding them to feel and consequently believe they are old. Physical declines because of emerging chronic illnesses, demonstrate an increase in negative feelings about older adults' bodies.⁶

The present results showed some ageist stereotypes that match traditional definitions of aging as being marked by the body's decline and loss of abilities.¹ Stereotypes like so see aging as the driver for negative

presences in the participants lives and the body as the vessel displaying these negative impacts on the self. Some participants relied on using those in immediate social environments as a tool for comparison that reinstates personal beliefs of not feeling as old. These behaviours demonstrate how embodiment influences the individual categorization of aging bodies by using present experiences and stimuli to define aging selves. Many participants shared positive mementos and outlooks with advice that was likely influenced by present ambitions and the interests introduced in childhood that have led them to an enjoyable life. In other transcripts, the lessons expressed were also influenced by cultural awareness and family dynamics.

FUTURE

Lastly, in future narratives, it was found that many older adults were willing to provide ample advice or guidance to younger generations and directly to the student interviewers, some of which they knew personally. The lessons or advice shared were often based on broad-level societal goals such as career advancement and overall happiness and wellbeing. The consensus was that younger adults should focus on education, establishing a career, and planning to make sure that choices reflect what they want in life and to support aging bodies and minds. The findings contribute to the existing body of evidence^{2,7,9} on aging embodiment while expanding older adult involvement in research through the opportunity to share life stories and lessons. Participants willingly shared advice or lessons with interviewers, hopeful for action or change that would benefit older adults beyond the interviews.

The lessons shared in the interviews were evidently expressions of what had occurred in the participants lives, what they had wished to achieve for themselves, and what they hope can happen for future generations. Future narratives were successful at responding to one of the supporting research questions; "What life lessons are beneficial for younger generations to know for their own aging experiences?" as shown through recommendations to the student interviewers. Most participants were not

regretful of the path's taken and instead were reflecting on how decisions impacted certain trajectories in current lives to respond to interview questions.

In comparison to other qualitative studies that focus on older adult narratives^{11,20} this study has a broader scope and did not feature a specific cohort of older adults with commonalities such as exercise interests.²⁰ For reference, Phoenix & Smith's²⁰ study on bodybuilding older adults also uses a narrative analysis approach and collects life-story interviews. However, the results on this cohort of active older adults demonstrated a singular common narrative of aging resistance, with the only notable differences being the degree of resistance, because of the specificity of the group and interests.²⁰ Many studies focus primarily on specific older adults' identities like gendered embodiment experiences²¹ or how different social circumstances converge with biological conditions to impact aging experiences.⁴ Therefore, the findings of this study, while wide-ranging, provide a more realistic glimpse into older adult lives and allow for individuality to thrive in the results over cohort commonality.

Furthermore, a narrative analysis approach considers the role of other age demographics in the aging experience by providing insight into the life lessons taught to the younger adult researchers about care, respect, and interactions with older adults. This intergenerational storytelling aspect has supported the research goals and questions to create a more comprehensive understanding of the embodiment experiences and lessons about aging that can be applied by younger adults, academics, and healthcare professionals.

As a note, not every interviewer and participant duo held a familial connection, therefore the study assists at creating intergenerational bonds and lessons for young adults in general. Conversing in a semi-structured interview facet provided opportunities to learn empathy about different aging experiences and abilities and for young adults to become more aware of the actions that may contribute to ageism and stereotyping. While embodiment and connections to

aging are not novel topics, the added elements of generational storytelling and life lessons create a new and meaningful study that considers the participants' identity divergence.

LIMITATIONS

Regarding the research, the most prevalent limitation to the project was completing secondary research analysis. By utilizing transcripts completed in the past, and for a different project and course, certain elements could not be controlled within the participant selection process and throughout the interviews. This limitation was minimized through the strategic selection of a small sample that were of similar substance and provided diverse content through unique life experiences. By increasing the interviews read, a thoughtful and varied sample size of 25 was selected, resulting in a more comprehensive analysis.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Moving forward, future research with older adults should focus on how experiences involving the body impact decision-making and experiences in aging lives. This element would be important to consider to further understand the roles that age perceptions and body changes have on the life course. Increased analysis of life experiences and the use of inclusive methodologies such as face-to-face interviews and narrative analysis will be integral for continuing older adult research ethically and respectfully.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the study provides further evidence into the continuum of the aging experience, through a sample of 25 semi-structured interview transcripts with no participant selection criteria. Analysis of the texts showed the emergence of three categories: past, present, and future with narratives of immigration, marriage, parenting, education, work-life, and retirement. The study demonstrates the importance of illuminating older adult lives to understand embodiment realities and to best support aging populations. Older adults continue to generously share wisdom and advice, especially with younger adults who are likely to be the future changemakers.

The thesis' findings act as evidence as to what can be learned from actively listening to older adults and can encourage health policy reform. Without continued interest in aging studies, older adult populations will not receive the care and consideration deserved to all humans throughout the life course. Hopefully, these findings inform aging environments to use social gerontology methods in future research.

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Keywords: *Embodiment, Aging, Generational, Identity, Storytelling, Life Course*

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