Abstract
This embedded case study describes perceptions of the residential experience of non-traditionally aged persons (between the ages of 18-64), living in the Long Term Care (LTC) setting. Prior research identifies non-traditionally aged persons as the fastest growing group admitting to residential LTC care. Due to the complexity of need, younger residents may potentially languish in LTC for twenty, thirty, or more years. Non-traditionally aged residents currently comprise about 15% of the total residential LTC population; yet, little is known about this burgeoning group of younger persons, including how they perceive themselves as residents in LTC settings and how they are perceived by persons who work there.

Multiple sources of data were examined in this study, including a series of intensive interviews with four non-traditionally aged residents, focus groups with Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) and Social Workers, examination of documents and artifacts, and observations. Findings were assessed for patterns and themes, and later analyzed through Cooley’s (1902) Theory of the Looking Glass Self, which explores the interconnectedness of the self and the social environment. Findings from this study indicate that non-traditionally aged persons perceive their admission to the LTC setting as a result of capricious fate, while workers perceive that non-traditionally aged persons are responsible for their admission, due to risky behaviors and bad choices. Non-traditionally aged residents are aware of how they are perceived by others and strategize ways to improve the perceptions of staff. These strategic actions improve the delivery of services and establish control within the institutional setting.

This study has several limitations, including the use of purposive sampling of Resident Participants, who share common characteristics of non-traditionally aged residents in other LTC settings, including permanent disability, low socio-economic status, social estrangement, and a
history of mental illness. Additionally, the small sample of participants limits this study to analytical generalizations, through the comparisons of findings to existing theory. Further, this study limited perceptions of staff to only CNAs and Social Workers; yet, findings demonstrate the importance of social connections between younger residents and non-direct care Support staff, including persons who work in the departments of Dietary, Housekeeping, and Maintenance.

Additional research could provide a more comprehensive exploration of the residential experience of non-traditionally aged residents living in LTC, informing policies and practices that incorporate social components into the delivery of services, improving the LTC experience for persons who live and work within these settings.

*Keywords:* LTC, Long Term Care, non-traditionally aged, perceptions, social connections, younger residents