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The Effects upon self-esteem of participating in the Senior Companion Program: A research design.

Brenda K. Oreskovich

The University of Montana

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THE EFFECTS UPON SELF-ESTEEM OF PARTICIPATING IN THE SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM:
A RESEARCH DESIGN

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Administration
University of Montana
1990

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Sept. 18, 1990
Date

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CHAPTER I
Introduction

History of the Senior Companion Program

The Senior Companion Program is an employment program funded by the federal government. Its primary goal is to allow low-income seniors to serve homebound elderly persons by aiding them as they attempt to battle chronic illness in their homes. For instance, Senior Companions may help with meal preparation, light housekeeping, or even accompanying a client to a doctor's appointment. The federal government sees this as a cost effective program because in comparison with Medicaid-financed nursing home care for the elderly, care provided by Senior Companions is very inexpensive. Through the Senior Companion Program the government can aid in the home health care process while providing Senior Companions with a $2.20 per hour stipend for their efforts. In Missoula County, the Senior Companion Program is administered by the Missoula Area Agency on Aging which currently employs 30 Senior Companions.

In evaluating program effectiveness, a policy analyst might focus on the health benefits to the homebound elderly. Or, an evaluation might focus on the economic benefits to the Senior Companions. The study proposed here focuses on a third possibility: assessing program effectiveness in terms of the social-psychological benefits derived by the
Senior Companions. It seeks to test the hypothesis that Senior Companions come to possess a greater sense of self-worth or self-satisfaction from participating through the program. These benefits, although perhaps unanticipated, can be very important to the quality of life for participating senior citizens and can add an additional justification for continued support for the program.

However, this paper does not offer the final results of such a study. Rather, it presents a research design for evaluating the effects of program participation on Senior Companions. Testing the hypothesis that participation entails social-psychological benefits requires a relatively sophisticated research design. It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to develop a research design as the first stage of a study to actually evaluate the social-psychological benefits of the Senior Companion Program.

The introductory chapter summarizes the many purposes of program evaluation and introduces the hypothesis regarding self-satisfaction. Subsequent chapters describe the steps involved in hypothesis formation, definition and operationalization of variables, choice of research design, and methods of data collection and analysis.

The Many Purposes of Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the process of reviewing program
policies and practices in order to determine the program's effectiveness. The following analysis demonstrates the many reasons for conducting a program evaluation.

In an era where everyone seems to have their own ideas about what the government should do, and for how much, as well as for whom, program administrators need a solid and reliable tool with which to justify their actions. They need to be able to speak clearly to the public about program goals and how successful they are in achieving them. One important purpose of program evaluation, therefore, is to provide the kind of information that will allow government officials and program administrators to answer to the taxpayers. Only in this way do government officials have an answer and a reason for what they do. Program evaluation can help them articulate why they do what they do, and thereby help educate the public.

A second purpose is to help secure continued funding. The public sector world seems to have an abundance of good ideas, but also a definite lack of resources with which to fund these ideas. Programs are constantly being cut back, cut out, phased out, or trimmed. The Missoula Area Agency on Aging, for example, had to operate on a four-day workweek for six weeks last year because of a cut in Missoula County funds. Needless to say, dollars are tight, and public servants are put in the role of having to battle each other for what is left. This means not only believing in
your program's goals, but being able to articulate to funding sources exactly why these goals are still important, and that they are in fact being met.

Funding sources, because of scarcity, have had to depend on elaborate methods of prioritizing who gets what portion of the remaining dollars. In order to compete in this "funding arena," program administrators should be well versed in research methods so that evaluations are valid and convincing to those who hold the purse strings.

A third purpose of program evaluation is to help justify program expansion. Quite often a program must grow in order to be truly effective. This was certainly true of the program for which this research design was developed. It began with city/county funding, and is now supported by federal, county, and United Way dollars. The concept of "seed money" was used, and the federal funding was allocated only when the local dollars showed that there was truly a need for this type of service. There was a program evaluation at the first year anniversary of the original grant, and the federal ACTION dollars were allocated only after this evaluation indicated that there was a need.

Programs quite often can expand only after evaluation has proven that need exists, that goals have even been minimally met, and that there is a structure in place that can support the program design. Hope for program expansion depends on effective program evaluation.
A fourth purpose is to generate new knowledge and facilitate communication. One of the unexpected fruits of program evaluation is that of "shared knowledge." When executive directors, directors, coordinators, support staff, and clients converge to evaluate, there is communication. Communication can sometimes mean learning, and this learning can happen on all levels. A rather simple example of this type of learning/evaluation could be the "Exit Interview" that the Senior Companion Program uses. As the Senior Companions retire, they are asked to go through an exit interview where they are asked questions about their past relationship with the program. This is a safe chance for the client to comment about what has been effective or ineffective in the program. Like all evaluations, its intent is not to chastise, but to communicate, learn, and possibly improve policies and procedures. This is an example of a client teaching administration a point of view. Those in the trenches have opinions and perspectives. Program evaluation offers one way of accessing this information.

Reversing the direction of this information is also helpful. Program evaluation can also aid program directors in clarifying goals to the client. Sometimes program goals end up being an "I can't see the forest for the trees" type of situation. The client is living the situation and needs help in stepping back to see the larger picture and to
carefully consider why the program exists.

Involvement in the program evaluation process can be a tool that promotes communication between all levels of workers. It answers not only "how are we doing?", but "how am I doing?" and "what are you doing?" Evaluation provides a vehicle by which co-workers in a program can share their feelings and thoughts about their roles in achieving program goals.

A fifth purpose is to discover unexpected positive or negative effects of the program. Program evaluations can turn up the unexpected. Even the best of plans and intentions can be foiled. It is necessary to put evaluations in place in order to pin-point what is happening with program goals. For example, county governments most often have some sort of weed control program. Spraying weeds with herbicides constitutes one of the ways that county governments achieve this weed control. But in the past few years citizens have pointed out that it is not only the weeds that get sprayed. Humans also come in contact with the herbicide, and there are possible detrimental effects, in spite of the fact that original program goals are being met. Government agencies must be adept at studying their programs and seeing not only whether immediate goals are being met, but also whether there are other goals that should be met as well.

Because administrators often make an ego investment in
their programs, they may be reluctant to acknowledge that problem areas exist. If the evaluation is set up using objective and scientific methods, then the occurrence of unexpected or even detrimental effects are more likely to be identified.

Another phenomenon that public administrators may face during evaluation is when the solution of one problem causes the birth of another and new problem. In this case the evaluation may indicate that the initial action was successful, but that there must be a "second stage" in which the program may have to be expanded in order to solve new problems.

A sixth purpose of program evaluation is to discover the next step of the solution. When first instituted, programs cannot always anticipate what kinds of stumbling blocks or problems may be ahead. The goals may be in sight, but the journey may be hazy. Evaluation allows administrators to stop during the process and to look around to see what is fouling things up. Only when solutions can be found for the little problems along the way can the journey toward an ultimate goal be resumed.

Because so many public agencies deal with people working with other people in order to achieve program goals, the need for scientifically gauged evaluation methods is extremely important. Subjective opinions will abound. Everyone will have a theory about why the "troops" are not
advancing up to speed. In order to keep the peace among these "troops," evaluation should be scientifically based. Otherwise those persons and personalities involved with the program will discount the study. Evaluations must be explained well to those involved, and suggestions for evaluation design should even come from those who have a stake in the program. This implies a lot of time and effort on the part of the evaluator, but without these steps the evaluation is jeopardized. There should be some sense of consensus during the development of program evaluation design.

A seventh purpose is to use program evaluation as an indication of future problems. Quite often program evaluations not only give public administrators an idea of what they have done, but also an inkling of problems, successes, or ideas to come. They can be a source of inspiration, or a place for a new idea or a new way to achieve that original goal. This may come about as a result of the aforementioned sharing of knowledge, and it does not always happen only when the study's conclusions are in. It can happen as the evaluation is being designed, especially if all persons working on the program are involved.

Evaluations can also be used in conjunction with other studies and evaluations. They are important for seeing the larger picture, especially in the social sciences. People-related problems are vast and very complex. They are
also on-going and change with the times due to advancing technology. Program evaluations must be able to build on each other, if possible, in order to find the sophisticated answers that are needed for our complex societal problems. 

An eighth, and final purpose, is to reveal patterns in things such as behavior, health problems, age related problems, and a myriad of other factors. A few years ago, the Senior Companion Program conducted a wellness study that had been prepared by Saint Patrick Hospital. After compiling the results, it revealed several patterns of health problems due to the stress involved in the work that the Senior Companions performed. Because the patterns were identified, steps were taken to alleviate those situations or circumstances that caused the stress. Without the evaluation, the program goals would have still been met, but at the expense of the health of the companions or clients. Evaluation can point out to program directors that they are 95% correct, but that there is a 5% cost which in some cases can be corrected.

**Self Satisfaction and Its Relationship to Work**

The purpose of the research design developed here is not to evaluate the Senior Companion Program as a whole. Rather, its purpose is limited to evaluating program effectiveness in enhancing self satisfaction among program participants. A central task of this research design is
determining how "self satisfaction" is to be defined and measured. At this point we can at least indicate the importance of the relationship between self satisfaction and work which is at the heart of this study.

As a society, we have long accepted the idea that gainful employment is at least one measure of a person's contributions to society. When we meet one another for the first time, we ask not only "Who are you?" but "What do you do?" Our identity and sense of self worth is intricately woven into our worklife. Those persons who find themselves on the welfare roles feel useless and less valuable as societal members, and retirees often suffer bouts of depression because their self worth was hinged to careers and duties.

Even seemingly insignificant work can make a difference to a person's self worth. One of the directors for a local soup kitchen reported that the transients in the soup line seemed happier and less food was wasted when the transients were allowed to help themselves to the food. This action might not technically be deemed "work," but even a "handout" feels better when taken with our own hand. We are, generally, creatures of activity. We often choose to interact, create, and toil. It makes our existence and days distinguishable. An elderly lady in a local nursing home, for example, found each day to be pretty much like all other days because of her life of blindness and immobility. But
Wednesdays were different for her. On Wednesdays a thoughtful orderly gave this woman a stack of towels to fold, not because this orderly was avoiding work, but because she realized the value of work. This task made the elderly patient feel useful. She was a needed member of this little community.

We know intuitively that work is important to our self concept and sense of self worth, but we cannot simply assume that working in the Senior Companion Program does in fact produce such results. It is the task of this paper to design a research project for testing this hypothesis.

The Ideal vs Reality: Evaluation Pitfalls to Avoid

In 1986, Missoula Aging Services, in conjunction with the Missoula Housing Authority, fashioned a six-page questionnaire concerning housing options for Missoula's elderly citizens. The questionnaire was printed using regular size type. It contained no definitions for such terms as "equitable housing conversion." There were no provisions made for illiterate or semi-illiterate participants. There was no consideration given for those who were hearing impaired and who might not understand the oral instructions, and yet the results were tallied and decisions were made using the information obtained through this questionnaire.

In 1987, the Federal ACTION program, which administers
the Senior Companion Program sent out a survey to the various agencies participating in the Senior Companion Program. The survey's intent was to find out how often Senior Companions provide "respite" for their clients, but there was no indication as to how the agencies involved were to define "respite." For example, was a companion providing respite if a care-giver lived across town, or only when the care-giver lived in the patient's home? Did the care-giver have to leave the premises in order to have the event termed "respite?" How long must the time period be in order to deem the visit "respite"? In addition, the agencies were instructed that the survey would take only 90 minutes to complete. Many agencies had to pull up files from the last year and reported spending three to four hours on the survey, and because of the vagueness in terms, they did not feel that they had completed it accurately.

These are but two examples of some of the problems that can be encountered when the public administrator is ill informed about the methods used in program evaluation. In both cases, participants felt that their efforts were a waste of time. Despite the good intentions of the persons designing the evaluation instruments, methodological errors reduced the validity of the data. The designer of the survey had not defined key terms well enough in one instance, and had designed poor questions in another. And in both cases there were logistical problems that were not
considered.

Lack of training on the part of public administrators is one of the main reasons that evaluations fall short of their intentions. Too often public administrators have been hired out of other disciplines, and even when there is a public administration background, indepth evaluation and research techniques are not always mastered.

Another problem that faces public administrators is the ethical nature involved in conducting social science studies. For instance, is it ethical to deny a group of people social services in order to set up a control group? Even though a control group would aid in a study of nutritional benefits gained/or lost by partaking of federal food commodities, the group not receiving commodities may be at risk for malnutrition or other health hazards. Social scientists often must face this type of problem when evaluating their programs. They must answer which goal creates a greater benefit: a tight and well-ordered evaluation or maximum coverage for all clients involved.

Sometimes evaluations can make use of "waiting lists." When resources are limited, a program often tries to serve all clients it can and puts those not served on a "waiting list." If this is the case, the "waiting list" can be used as a control group. The trouble here, however, is that the study may be rushed because membership in the control group is theoretically fluctuating. Persons on the "waiting list"
should become clients at the earliest opportunity, but administrators may be tempted to prolong a person's tenure on the waiting list in order to complete evaluations properly. Again the situation forms an ethical question representing a very important problem in the process of program evaluation.

In addition, gathering data from ever-changing subjects such as people is a constant challenge to the public administrator. When working with inanimate objects, the evaluator or researcher can better control the research. When a researcher tries to evaluate by gathering information from human participants, there are many variables to take into consideration. The evaluator must anticipate or try to control for catastrophic events in the participant's life. Needless to say, this is often difficult, if not impossible. In the proposed research design, the participant's age adds to the possible catastrophes that could be encountered because of an increase in health problems.¹ This problem is exacerbated in lengthy longitudinal studies where chronic illnesses can change the status of the elderly participant, or where widowhood drastically alters the emotional status of the participant. All of these types of events make the chore of evaluation more difficult and challenging for the social scientist.

When data is collected from the human species, the researcher must also contend with the logistical problem of
getting the experimental group to take the study seriously.\textsuperscript{2} Quite often people feel they are "polled to death" these days, considering the number of telephone surveys and mail questionnaires they receive. It is essential that those involved treat the study as something important. The researcher may want to ask for volunteers so that those persons who do not want to participate may exclude themselves. This, of course, can cause an alternate problem: that of getting a large enough sample group. But if people are forced to complete surveys, interviews, or questionnaires against their will, the results to the evaluation will be greatly jeopardized.

Program evaluations which involve human subjects may also involve measuring the unmeasurable. Evaluation research is a matter of finding out whether something is there or not there, whether something happened or didn't happen."\textsuperscript{3} Public administrators may lack training when it comes to evaluation, but it is a difficult task at best even with some instruction as to techniques.

With these many potential problems in mind, it is my intention to create a research design for this professional paper that would avoid these types of pitfalls. I believe the Senior Companion Program achieves benefits for program participants that are distinct from its stated purposes, and I believe that program evaluation may be one way in which to document these added benefits. There are many reasons why,
in the work-a-day world, that public administrators and program directors cannot achieve valid evaluation results. I hope, by taking a scientific approach to this research design to at least rectify my own lack of training. By creating this research design and offering it as my professional paper, I intend to master some of the techniques of program evaluation so that my own evaluations will provide meaningful results.
CHAPTER II

An Overview of the Research Design Process

This chapter analyzes what is involved in identifying the type of research that is appropriate given one's program evaluation goals, formulating a research hypothesis, operationalizing variables, and developing an experimental design. This overview provides the basis for understanding the key elements of the research design presented in Chapter III.

Clarifying Research Goals

Before the social scientist can formulate a hypothesis or conceptualize variables, the purpose or goals of the research must be determined. One author suggests that the first step in creating a research design is to prepare an outline of the final research report. This exercise forces the researcher to think through the types of information she/he hopes to gather as well as the direction or goals for the study. This outline for the research report can, of course, be altered if the study turns up unanticipated information or takes a different direction.

Choosing a Major Type of Research Design

Goal clarification can aid in pinpointing what major type of research design should be used. Tripodi, Fellin, and Meyer divide social research into three major types: Experimental Research, Quantitative/Descriptive Research, and Exploratory Research. Experimental research involves...
altering one or more independent variables in order to test a hypothesized effect on some dependent variable. The quantitative/descriptive type of research therefore uses measuring devices that help describe relationships between the variables, but does not involve altering one of the variables in order to test a suspected effect on the other variable. Finally, if the research were exploratory in nature, it would be understood to be the first step among many and would therefore be setting a stage for subsequent studies. Sometimes a design will be a combination of these categories, but it is helpful to determine early which basic type of research design is most appropriate for achieving your research goals.

The research designer must understand the purpose or goals of the research. Looking "to the end" before "starting at the beginning" helps to clarify goals and to give a general direction to the research.

**Problem Reformulation and Formulation of the Hypothesis**

Before formulating a hypothesis it helps to understand what a hypothesis is. Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong succinctly define a hypothesis as "a testable statement of presumed relationships between two or more concepts." After these concepts are specifically defined, they are then referred to as variables. Therefore, one of the first tasks a social scientist faces is that of defining the concepts
involved so that they can be stated as variables. Tripodi defines this process as "concept translatability." After the variables are named, their presumed relationship can be articulated.

Before one reaches this point, however, it is often valuable to prepare not just one hypothesis, but many. This is called "problem reformulation" and is achieved by writing down as many hypotheses as are associated with the problem or phenomenon in order to figure out which of the hypotheses are most crucial for achieving research goals. In a sense this method of problem reformulation allows the researcher to broaden the problem or phenomenon in order to, in the end, limit and focus more specifically upon it. This process also allows the social scientist to focus on those hypotheses for which there is information within the range of one's resources.

The process of problem reformulation also allows one to consider alternative variables or additional independent variables that might be partially responsible for the presumed relationship. Antecedent variables, for example, come before the assumed independent variable and many play an important role in affecting the hypothesized relationship. Problem reformulation is thus a type of brainstorming that allows one to pose all of the possible relationships between the variables connected with the phenomenon under study.
Problem reformulation can also help the social scientist decide whether their proposed problem is one which can be scientifically studied. Even though we may desire an answer to a given question, sometimes we are not able to achieve this answer because the variables are not measurable or, for some other reason, the relationship cannot be tested. The process of problem reformulation helps us determine this and keeps us from entering upon a dead end road.

Another question that can be answered during the problem reformulation period is whether the study of the proposed hypothesis is ethical in nature. Clients' rights to privacy and informed consent must be taken into consideration. This preview of due process can help the social scientist to avoid research methods that would have to be aborted because they threatened clients' rights.

After reformulating the problem, and before specifying a particular research hypothesis, the social scientist should consider which type of hypothesis seems required by the research goals. There are three basic types of hypotheses: descriptive hypotheses; correlational hypotheses; and cause-effect hypotheses. According to Tripodi, "These hypotheses form a continuum that is based on increasing amounts of information -- with descriptive hypotheses containing the least and cause-effect hypotheses containing the most information."
Descriptive hypotheses are concerned with the regularity or frequency of a given phenomenon and often answer a question. These hypotheses are of a lower degree of information and involve simple compilation of facts. These simple facts, however, are important to social science and when combined with other research often contribute to theory development. An example of a descriptive hypothesis might be "Senior Companions are 60 years of age or older."

Correctional hypotheses take the information gathering a step farther and not only describe a relationship between the dependent and independent variable, but add an indication of amount as well as the direction of this relationship. This type of hypothesis often states statistically whether the relationship is positive or negative and to what degree. The degree or amount of correlation between the independent variable and dependent variable is noted by using a scale from zero to +1.00 or -1.00. Zero to +1.00 would indicate a positive relationship, while zero to -1.00 would indicate a negative relationship.10

The third type of hypothesis is inclusive of the other two types and is the most difficult type of hypothesis to test. This is a hypothesis which seeks to demonstrate cause and effect. Like the correlational hypothesis and the descriptive hypothesis, the cause-effect hypothesis is

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interested in describing a relationship between two variables and also in indicating the degree and direction of the relationship. In addition, however, a cause-effect hypothesis is more complex in that it tries to specify what factor or factors are actually causing change in other variables.

**Operationalizing the Independent and Dependent Variables**

Once the hypothesis has gone through its problem reformulation stage, the next step for the research designer is one of defining the variables in ways that they can be measured. When a procedure or method of measurement is involved in the defining process, the variable is said to be operationalized.

The dependent variable in the research described in the next chapters is "self-esteem." Because this term denotes an intangible, and what seems to be an unmeasurable feeling, it is extremely difficult to specify or operationalize. "Of all the imps that inhabit the nervous system -- that 'little black box' in psychological theorizing -- the one we call 'meaning' is held by common consent to be the most elusive. Yet, again by common consent among social scientists, this variable is one of the most important determinants of human behavior. It therefore behooves us to try, at least, to find some kind of objective index."11 Osgood Suci, and Tannenbaum developed during the 1950s a new method for measuring covert events such as
thoughts or feelings. The process they developed became known as the semantic differential (SD) scale. This scale "presents the respondent with a given stimulus, such as a person or event, that is to be rated on a scale between a series of polar opposite adjectives." Social scientists have been able to measure things like self concept and other intangibles using this scale. The SD scale is reported to have reliabilities of .80 or better.13

Another instrument developed to measure self-esteem is the "life satisfaction scale." The Life Satisfaction Scale is a Likert scale consisting of statements about life to which the respondent either agrees, disagrees, or checks an undecided response indicated by a question mark.

Choosing An Appropriate Experimental Design

The choice of experimental design will depend upon the purposes of the study, the nature of the variables and how they are to be measured, the degree of scientific vigor desired, financial considerations, and the realities of how to control for other variables that may influence the relationship being studied. There are three main kinds of experimental designs: the classic experimental design, the quasi experimental design, and the preexperimental design. The classic experimental design involves use of a random sample and control group, a pre and post test. The quasi
experimental design uses the pre and post test, but does not use randomization with the sample. Preexperimental designs use neither randomization and have only a posttest after the stimulus has been administered.

**Summary**

This chapter has described some of the most important elements of the research process, including the identification of the appropriate type of research, formulation of a hypothesis, operationalization of variables, and choice of an appropriate research design. The next chapter describes a research design for evaluating the Senior Companion Program.
Chapter III
Research Design

This chapter presents a research design for the program evaluation study proposed in Chapter I. The various components of this research design are organized according to the format developed in Chapter II. The same chapter headings are used wherever possible.

Clarifying Research Goals

Program evaluation is applied research, i.e., it is intended to have some real-world effects. Some of the possible "real-world" uses of program evaluation are described in Chapter I, and the data obtained in the study proposed here can be put to many of those uses. The goal of this research is to verify whether there are any added benefits for the participants in the Senior Companion Program. If such positive effects can be demonstrated, this information may be used for purposes of program fund-raising, recruitment, and general program maintenance.

Choosing a Major Type of Research Design

Given the research goals identified above, the quantitative/descriptive type of research design seems most appropriate for this research project. The proposed research focuses on the relationship between involvement with the Senior Companion Program and its effects on the participants. The study will thus describe the
characteristics of a given population and its relationship to its work situation. Because the sample frame is from membership in a federal program, the use of the research would be for program evaluation. Therefore, the type of research classification (according to Tripodi's classification system) is quantitative/descriptive, and the use of the research is program evaluation (also called evaluative research.)

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<th>TYPE OF RESEARCH</th>
<th>RESEARCH USED FOR:</th>
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<tr>
<td>QUANTITATIVE/DESCRIPTIVE</td>
<td>PROGRAM EVALUATION = EVALUATIVE RESEARCH</td>
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Although the proposed research does not intend to evaluate all of the goals of the Senior Companion Program, its purpose is still of an evaluative nature.

Problem Reformulation and Formulation of the Hypothesis

As described in Chapter II, problem reformulation involves brainstorming about possible relationships between variables. The following is a list of alternative hypotheses drafted by the author after thinking through the relationship between program participation and the effects on participants, and other variables that might influence such a relationship.

$H_1$ Participation in the Senior Companion Program
increases the self-esteem of Senior Companions.

H2 Going to in-service meetings once a month increases the self-esteem of Senior Companions.

H3 Retirement increases self-esteem.

H4 Age has a positive effect on self-esteem.

H5 Participating with Missoula Aging Services has an effect on self-esteem.

H2 can be eliminated because the research is concerned with participation generally, not just participation at in-service meetings. H3 is a possible hypothesis but does not address the issue of participation that this study is concerned with. The variable of retirement must nonetheless be controlled for in this research. The same is true for H4. Age is a variable that must be controlled for if the effects of program participation are to be determined. H5 is not an appropriate hypothesis because although all of the participants are technically participating with Missoula Aging Services, the antecedent variable in this case is their association with the Senior Companion Program. Therefore, H1 is the hypothesis that best describes the relationship between variables as defined by the research goals described above.

Proposed hypothesis: Participation in the Senior Companion Program has a positive effect on self-esteem.
Operationalizing the Independent & Dependent Variables

Working from the proposed hypothesis, the next step would be to define what "participation" in the Senior Companion Program will mean during this study. Participation in the program will be defined in this way:

1. Anyone who works regularly in the role of Senior Companion. "Regularly" is defined as approximately 4 hours a day, 5 days a week.

2. "Work" is defined in terms of performing the activities of Senior Companions as described in Appendix A. A "participant" for purposes of this study is defined as:

1. A person who regularly attends the monthly in-service meetings provided for the Senior Companion Group. Monthly in-service meetings are 3-4 hour sessions in which training (health care, nutrition, socialization, etc.) occurs.

2. A person who has worked as a Senior Companion for at least 12 months.

3. A person who has not taken a "leave of absence" for more than one month prior to this 12-month period.

Only if the preceding criteria are met would a Senior Companion be given the instrument chosen to measure self-esteem. If any of them are not met, the Senior Companion could not be considered a true participant and this would affect the validity of the study.

Another definition to be determined would be the
definition of a Senior Companion. It was discovered that qualifications for applying to the Senior Companion Program implied restrictions on age and economic status. Therefore the definition of a Senior Companion is a retired person who is 60 years or older and has a yearly income of $7,215 (or less) per one-person household. This definition would be used for the control group as well as for the participants in the study.

The last definition that must be determined is a definition for self-esteem. In this case self-esteem will be defined and measured using the "life-satisfaction scale". This scale is a pre-existing scale chosen as a measurement tool because of the similarity in meaning between life satisfaction and self-esteem. Self-esteem will also be defined using the semantic differential scale.

Both scales were checked for a balance in positive and negative items so as not to cause response pattern anxiety. These scales are presented in Appendices C, D, and E. (Life-satisfaction: positive = #1,2,4,5,7,8,9,12; negative = #3,6,10,11,13. Semantic Differential Scale: positive = #1,2,4,5,8,10; negative = #3,6,7,9.) This balance also controls for participants in the study who are not or cannot take the questions seriously. A random response would show up as illogical. This would also help spot illiterate participants who would be unable to honestly respond to the scales.
Measurement for both scales relies on a simple "point system", with the higher points designated for the positive attitude responses. The participants and members of the control group would both be surveyed using these scales and their self-esteem would be measured in terms of their resulting scores. High scores, for example, would be used as indicators of relatively high self-esteem. Both scales would be used and scored independently. The results would be compared as a further check of the hypothesis.

Choosing An Appropriate Experimental Design

Assuming that testing the hypothesis calls for an experimental or preexperimental research design, the social scientist must then address questions regarding sample size and definition of control groups. From what geographic boundaries will the sample size be chosen? Will it be possible to follow the sample size through a longitudinal study? In this study, the last question is especially important. A longitudinal study may be contaminated by catastrophic occurrences such as major health problems, loss of spouse, etc. If one were to expand geographic boundaries, this might introduce variables such as differences in program management techniques.

The social scientist must decide what benefits or problems arise with the sample and choose a research design that best deals with these limiting factors. In this case,
it was initially determined that the type of research design would be a classic research design. This meant that there should be a random sample for control and experimental groups selected from the population, a pretest given, the stimulus administered, and then a posttest given. After this the results would be studied to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

The first problem encountered is the difficulty in randomly choosing the sample. This is almost an impossible achievement because the population which constitutes any given Senior Companion Program is too small. Unless the social scientist chose to study the program nation-wide, there could be no randomization of the sample. Since financial constraints would make this unfeasible, it was decided that a classic experimental design would not be the best option.

A quasi-experimental design contains a pretest, stimulus administered via the independent variable, and a posttest, but without randomization of the sample. After consideration of this design it was decided that the results would likely be contaminated due to the longitudinal nature of a classic research design. The experimental group would likely experience acute health problems due to their age. This would weaken the study because the health problems would most likely affect the responses to the self-satisfaction and semantic differential
scales. A respondent, for example, might be happy with the Senior Companion work, yet unhappy with their health situation. The validity of results might be threatened due to these possibilities.

Therefore it was decided that to test hypothesis involving these complexities and problems, the best approach would be to use a preexperimental design. There are three types of preexperimental designs: the one-shot case study, the one-group pretest-posttest design, and the static group comparison. The one-shot case study design is inadequate for this study because it does not involve a control group and the researcher has no basis for concluding that program participation effected the survey responses. The one-group pretest-posttest is inadequate because it also lacks a control group and because it is longitudinal in nature and may be contaminated for reasons listed previously. Thus, the best preexperimental design for this study is the static-group comparison. The following illustration shows the static-group comparison design:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{experimental group} & \quad \text{stimulus} \quad \text{posttest} \\
\text{control group} & \quad \text{no stimulus} \quad \text{posttest}
\end{align*}
\]

With this design the experimental group would be the Senior Companions and the control group would be those persons on the waiting list who wanted to become Senior Companions. The experimental group would have to fulfill
the qualifications listed in the definition of "participant" in the program. The control group and the experimental group would both have to fulfill the definition of "Senior Companion": one who is retired, 60 years of age or older, with income limitations. The stimulus would be employment and participation with the program; and the posttests would be the semantic differential scale and Likert self-satisfaction scale. The posttests would be given to 50 Senior Companions and 50 persons on the waiting list.

These posttests would be administered after a year's time to the experimental group and the control group. The results between the groups would be compared after matching participants using the quota matrix illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>SINGLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 70 YEARS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVER 70 YEARS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This matrix allows the research to control for age, gender and marital status. This is a slight variation in the procedure since a quota matrix is normally used to divide the sample frame into the experimental group and the control group evenly. In this case a quota matrix would be kept for both groups and this would aid in the matching process that would be used to raise internal validity. Also, the date
that the participant entered the program would be matched as close as possible to their counterpart in the control group in order to control for historical influences.

The final sample size in this design would fluctuate according to how many persons were put on the waiting list and remained there for at least 12 months' time. This is an unfortunate but unavoidable problem with this design due to the fact that no one can tell exactly how many applicants will be put on a waiting list. This is determined by many extraneous factors such as the visibility of the program or the need for employment. The important fact is that programs do have waiting lists. Over a period of time the new members on the waiting list, and the new participants in the Senior Companion Program could be posttested and then matched in order to test the hypothesis.
Summary

Research design for the social scientist is an awesome task, and not one to be taken lightly. There is much planning, replanning, and struggle if the problem or phenomenon at hand is to be verified or understood. Social scientists face countless problems of experimental control, politically sensitive situations, and the task of measuring covert thoughts and feelings such as self-esteem. Their "laboratory" ranges far and wide, and their units of analysis entail some of our most fragile and forgotten citizens. But with a large amount of persistence, and the help of an ever-growing collection of tried measurement tools and experimental designs, the social scientist can add the results of one more valid experiment or study to the world of social research.

However, understanding the weaknesses of one's design is one of the most important aspects to doing social science research. The social scientist attempts to say something true and scientific about a phenomenon, but it is even more significant that the social scientist understand what cannot be said, and for what reasons.

The experimental design proposed in this paper, for instance, has many limitations, for reasons already touched upon. Preexperimental designs are less than ideal in terms of internal validity. Selection is a threat to the internal validity of this design because neither the experimental
group nor the control group is randomized. Comparability between the two groups, however, is controlled for to some extent by using the quota matrix. Experimental attrition is another threat central to this design's validity. The advanced age of the experimental group and control group would possibly interfere with getting an appropriate sample size. Again this is one of the reasons that a preexperimental design was used. The high rate of attrition would make a longitudinal study almost impossible.

The threat of maturation to internal validity is affected for this same reason. When the social scientist works with a population that is at risk for catastrophic events, the threat of maturation to the validity of the design is raised significantly. The quota matrix was an attempt to control for events that might influence the participants, but this is certainly a weak link in the design. The posttest may be given on a day when the experimental group or control group members have experienced a health problem. Their age naturally makes this a higher possibility.

Testing is not a threat to internal validity in this design because there is only a posttest involved. There may be some concern on the part of the control group that they answer affirmatively to the measurement tools, but the administrator of the posttests could assure the control group members that the posttest has nothing to do with their
possibilities for employment. There would be no trouble with effects from taking the test more than once, since the preexperimental design uses only a posttest.

Instrumentation is also not a significant concern or threat for this same reason. The administrators give only a posttest, and therefore have little chance to improve their administration of the test. Also, a written instruction sheet precedes the posttest with explicit directions for taking the test. This attempts to control for any changes the test administrator might include.

Statistical regression is a threat to internal validity that could be controlled for by throwing out the highest and the lowest scores in both the experimental group and the control group. However, with a fluctuating sample size due to the advanced age of these groups this may cause a problem. The social scientist may have to opt for using all of the scores in order to get a large enough sample size and therefore not be able to control for this particular threat to internal validity.

Again, creating a research design is a complicated process. Sometimes the design is less than adequate and only the beginning of the research. A preexperimental design is often followed by further research using the more sophisticated designs. Or the social scientist might have to be satisfied with using something like a preexperimental design and realizing its stipulations.
The author realizes the stipulations of the proposed study in this paper. Nonetheless, there are hopes that the study can be conducted and that the conclusions derived can be used to improve the effectiveness of the Senior Companion Program.
CHAPTER IV

APPENDIX A

APPROPRIATE SENIOR COMPANION ACTIVITIES

1. PERSONAL CARE:
   A) FEEDING, DRESSING, GROOMING, CUTTING HAIR;
   B) ASSISTING CLIENT WITH WALKING, GETTING OUT OF BED, GETTING TO THE BATHROOM;
   C) ASSISTING WITH MEDICAL OR PHYSICAL THERAPY AND/OR MONITORING MEDICATION;
   D) ACCOMPANYING A PERSON TO A DOCTOR OR NURSE FOR TREATMENT;
   E) PROVIDING THERAPEUTIC OR GRIEF COUNSELING;
   F) ASSISTING IN REALITY ORIENTATION/AWARENESS;
   G) ENCOURAGING EXERCISE, TAKING WALKS WITH CLIENT, PROVIDING INFORMATION ON EXERCISE OR RECREATION.

2. NUTRITION:
   A) PREPARING FOOD, PLANNING MEALS, GROCERY SHOPPING, LABELING AND ORGANIZING;
   B) PROVIDING HEALTH OR NUTRITION INFORMATION;
   C) ACCOMPANYING CLIENT TO A NUTRITION SITE.

3. SOCIAL/RECREATION:
   A) PROVIDING COMPANIONSHIP, TALKING, LISTENING, CHEERING UP;
   B) FOSTERING CLIENT CONTACT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS;
   C) ACCOMPANYING CLIENT TO A RECREATION OR SOCIAL EVENT.

4. HOME MANAGEMENT:
   A) SHOPPING, DOING ERRANDS;
   B) WRITING LETTERS, READING, FILLING OUT FORMS;
   C) LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING;
   D) LIGHT GARDENING;
   E) ASSISTING WITH MONEY MANAGEMENT, HELPING BUDGET FUNDS;
   F) MAKING NON-STRENUEOUS HOME REPAIRS/WEATHERIZATION.

5. INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY:
   A) PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT COMMUNITY SERVICES, ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES;
   B) HELPING CLIENTS RECEIVE A NEEDED SERVICE (FOOD STAMPS, VISITING NURSE, SSI, MEDICAID, MEDICARE, ETC.);
   C) BRINGING UNMET NEEDS TO THE ATTENTION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS AND VOLUNTEER STATION STAFF AND OTHER CARE PROVIDERS.

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APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES FOR INSTITUTIONAL PLACEMENTS:

PUSHING A WHEELCHAIR, READING, LETTER WRITING, GAMES, REVITALIZING FAMILY TIES; ENCOURAGING FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS TO BECOME INVOLVED WITH AND PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE ADULTS; TAKING SHORT WALKS AROUND INSTITUTION GROUNDS, PARTICIPATING IN THE MOVIES, THERAPY SESSIONS, CRAFT PROJECTS, OR OUTINGS. ENCOURAGING AN INTEREST IN PERSONAL GROOMING. ASSISTING WITH EATING.
APPENDIX B

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE SENIOR COMPANION PROGRAM

A. Purpose

The Senior Companion Program (SCP) is authorized under Title II, Part C, of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended (P.L. 93-113). The program's dual purpose is to create part-time stipended volunteer community service opportunities for low-income persons aged 60 and over and to provide support person-to-person services to assist adults having exceptional needs, developmental disabilities, or other special needs for companionship.

B. Goals

The goals of the Senior Companion Program are to:

(1) develop volunteer service opportunities through which low-income older persons can contribute to their communities;

(2) provide a stipend and other benefits which enable eligible persons to participate as Senior Companions without cost to themselves;

(3) establish new social service roles for low-income older persons through which they can maintain a sense of self-worth, retain physical health and mental alertness, and enrich their social contacts;

(4) provide supportive services to adults, especially older persons, in an effort to maintain independent living.
APPENDIX C

The next two pages consist of two scales which will help us determine how you feel about yourself before you work with our program, and also how you feel after you have worked with our program for a given period of time. Please sign on the appropriate line if you wish to aid us in this study.

Informed consent signature______________________________

Thank you for helping us with our study. Your responses to the questions are confidential and will in no way be used for or against you as you apply to be a Senior Companion.

In the first set of questions simply follow the instructions that begin the test. Here are some sample questions for you to try. There are no right or wrong answers.

**Sample:**

0. I LIKE TO EAT SUPPER
   WHILE I WATCH THE NEWS.

01. As I read, my eyes get tired.

**In the second set of questions, put an X in the space which best describes how you feel about yourself.**

**Sample:**

0. LOUD ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ SOFT

01. THICK ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ ______ THIN

Do you have any questions?
Here are some statements about life in general that people feel differently about. Would you read each statement on the list, and if you agree with it, put a check mark in the space under "agree." If you do not agree with the statement, put a check mark in the space under "disagree." If you are not sure one way or the other, put a check mark in the space under "?". PLEASE BE SURE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION BELOW.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. As I grow older, things seem better than I thought they would be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have gotten more of the breaks in life than most of the people I know.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. This is the dreariest time of my life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am just as happy as when I was younger.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. These are the best years of my life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most of the things I do are boring or monotonous.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The things I do are as interesting to me as they ever were.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. As I look back on my life, I am fairly satisfied.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I have made plans for things I'll be doing a month or a year from now.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. When I think back over my life, I didn't get most of the important things I wanted.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Compared to other people, I get down in the dumps too often.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I've gotten pretty much what I expected out of life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In spite of what people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

How do you feel about yourself? Place an X on one of seven lines between each pair.

I am

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>______</th>
<th>BAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KIND</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
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<td>______</td>
<td>CRUEL</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEAK</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>STRONG</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAST</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
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<td>______</td>
<td>SLOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLEASANT</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
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<td>______</td>
<td>UNPLEASANT</td>
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<td>SAD</td>
<td>______</td>
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<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>HAPPY</td>
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<td>BITTER</td>
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<td>SHARP</td>
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<td>______</td>
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<td>DELICATE</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>RUGGED</td>
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<tr>
<td>VALUABLE</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>WORTHLESS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., p.310.

3. Ibid., p.300.

4. Ibid., p.87.


8. Ibid., p.80.


13. Ibid., p.322.


15. Hoover, op. cit., p.89.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


