

**Why Librarians Leave:
A Proposal to Study the Factors that Influence Librarians to Exit the Profession**

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A professional position in most libraries requires a masters degree in library science and a great deal of on-the-job training to learn local procedures and norms. The educational time investment alone can be significant, spanning up to two years of full-time enrollment and often entailing a practicum or internship. Given the amount of pre-employment preparation for a career in librarianship and the resources that libraries spend to develop early-career professionals, the failure to retain librarians in the profession is a great waste to the librarians who leave and the institutions that lose them.

When librarians exit the profession, the losses to both employer and employee are substantial. These losses include the obvious economic ones. The employer may invest scarce resources to recruit and train new professionals, as well as to build programs around and provide staff support to one person who has been groomed for a particular post. The librarian may be burdened with debt associated with her education and training, the job search process, and moving expenses.

There are also intangible costs. A dedicated librarian may have built ties to the local community through service within and outside the library proper; in this case, both the individual and the community lose trusted relationships and meaningful interaction. When someone who is active in the professional community through association membership, listservs, or leadership positions leaves librarianship, he loses a network of supportive colleagues and intellectual stimulation. In turn, the professional community experiences a void where that librarian once

made his contribution. Finally, any kind of major professional change, whether positive or negative, can cause stress to the individual and his family.

While there are circumstances in which it is beneficial for a librarian to leave the profession, such as, in cases of ineptitude, inability to work within established ethical boundaries, or true dissatisfaction with the work, this research proposal assumes that in most cases, retaining librarians is a worthwhile and achievable objective. The Institute for Museum and Library Services (2005) estimates that 58% of librarians will retire by 2019. A better understanding of the reasons why librarians leave could guide library administrators in creating and improving retention programs and may be able to help library and information science (LIS) educators design programmatic or curricular strategies to address these issues before the students enter the workforce.

This type of research is timely and fits well with the recent trend in library workforce studies conducted to enable better planning for recruitment and retention in light of changing age demographics and pending retirements (8Rs Research Team, 2005; Steffen, Lance, Russell, & Lietzau, 2004). Studies currently in progress include *The National Workforce Study (US)* and *Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS)*. WILIS will examine career patterns of LIS graduates in North Carolina over the past forty years. The study proposed here will be a pilot study to determine the design and feasibility of a larger main study to be conducted in one year; this larger study will target specific respondents of the WILIS survey from all types of libraries who have left librarianship, in order to investigate the reasons behind their departure from the profession.

Review of Literature

The reasons that people leave professions are complex, and have personal, social, psychological, environmental, and institutional dimensions. To delineate the process of

professional exit, it is necessary to look at a variety of types of literature from multiple fields, including sociology, business and management, and applied psychology. The research ranges from theoretical to practical, quantitative to qualitative, and varies in focus. The literature review will examine a sociological framework called the life course perspective, which will be used in data collection and analysis, and then will focus on the research on voluntary turnover and retention across professions.

The life course perspective

Originating in the 1960s in sociological research, the life course perspective is a “theoretical orientation” that functions as a lens with which one studies the entirety of a human life as a function of *context* (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003, p. 3). This framework arose out of longitudinal studies of people in the early part of the twentieth century, serving as a method for understanding the interaction of historical, generational, geographical, and societal forces that impact a person’s life choices and “pathways” throughout his entire life, from birth to death.

Global and national events, such as wars and economic depressions, and the interplay of age cohort, personal psychology and social role are a few of the phenomena that are analyzed along with life history. The variety of stages and roles throughout the life course provide the context for decisions made, whether an individual is an adolescent or parent, worker or retiree, criminal or law-abiding citizen. Additionally, the tension between “structure” (institutional/social forces) and “agency,” (individual choice) is explored (Anisef & Axelrod, 2001). Life course studies are frequently interdisciplinary, with fields such as demography, psychology, anthropology, and even biology sharing this research paradigm (Settersten, 2003).

Since most people in western societies work for such a large portion of their lifespans, all the while entering and exiting different phases of life, the investigation of the career choices,

turnover, and abandonment of professions will be well-served by utilizing a life course perspective. The WILIS project mentioned above plans to use life course analysis to understand the complex career trajectories of library and information science graduates. A bird's-eye view of a person's entire career path, situated in its historical, geographical, and cultural context creates a richer field of data for a researcher to mine.

Henretta (2003), in an overview of work and retirement from the life course perspective, indicates that the parameters of a working life have been dictated, at least in the last seventy-five years, by institutionalized norms of compulsory education for children, and mandatory retirement for elders. Changes in society and industry have led to greater flexibility in this "age-based" model, resulting in increased late-career job changes and re-entry of retirees to the workforce. Workers who have broken the bounds of the age-based model will have multiple reasons for having done so, including changing family responsibilities and the desire to fulfill new personal goals (Carr & Sheridan, 2001).

Librarianship is characterized by many late entrants to the profession, from a variety of different careers (Wilder, 2003). The differing backgrounds and age cohorts of these late-career new librarians mean that each will have differing norms and understandings of what it means to start and leave jobs, institutions, and careers. "One size does not fit all" in this case, thus the life course perspective compels the researcher to look at all the individual forces that might influence someone to abandon a profession in which they have invested so much.

Individual decisions are often based on societal norms that shift over time. For example, risk assessment, when applied to the act of changing jobs or professions, is subjective, and often mirrors the societal outlook on economic conditions. A person who believes that jobs are scarce or that one should remain loyal to an employer until retirement might be more risk averse than

someone who has changed jobs successfully every few years. In the 21st century, the risk involved in leaving a profession may not be the “leap of faith” it once was. However, it is an urban myth that people change careers in the range of three to eight times in their lives. The fact is that while the Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that people change *jobs* on average about ten times in a lifetime, the Bureau does not estimate for *career* changes, since defining the term “career change” is next to impossible (Terkanian, 2006).

The life course perspective will be used in the development of interview questions that elicit rich, detailed answers about a librarian’s career, through its growth and development and the eventual professional exit. The goal of the interview is to hear a person’s story and to understand the underlying forces behind his choice to leave. Inkson’s (2007) metaphors for the variety of ways people view their careers fit nicely with the life course terminology; whether a career is a story, a resource, a role, a relationship, a journey, a form of self-expression, a “perfect-fit,” or a prison, it is a highly *individual* experience. Its existence and ending can be fraught with meaning, emotion, and personal power or failure.

Voluntary turnover

The research on voluntary turnover over the past thirty years is vast, and can best be described as developmental in that many researchers across disciplines have spent careers working steadily to build and refine predictive models (Arnold & Feldman, 1982; Blau & Lunz, 1998; Currivan, 1999; P. Hom, Katerberg, & Huhn, 1979; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2001; Mobley, 1977; Spector, 1991). Job satisfaction, professional and organizational commitment, perceptions of work environment, and demographic factors all contribute to the generally accepted models of turnover.

Scholars have built, applied and tested complex theories of why and how turnover occurs, as well (Krausz, Koslowsky, Shalom, & Elyakim, 1995; T. W. Lee & Maurer, 1997). The formation of process models that take into account the interrelationship of attitudes, decisions, and behaviors also fall into this category of scholarship (Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998; Prestholdt, Lane, & Matthews, 1987). Table 1 summarizes the theories and models most often referenced in the literature.

Table 1

Model/Theory	Summary	Author
Theory of Reasoned Action/ Theory of Planned Behavior	Behavioral intent is the best predictor of actual performance of the behavior.	(Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)
Muchinsky Model	Economic conditions mediate the role of job satisfaction in turnover: job dissatisfaction is a better predictor of turnover when unemployment is low and opportunities abound.	(Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980)
Person-Environment Fit Theory	Fit is the extent to which employee feels comfortable and a good match with her employer and organization.	(Takase, Maude, & Manias, 2005)
Hom-Griffeth Model	Job dissatisfaction leads to a gradual withdrawal of engagement in one's job, and results in eventual turnover.	(P. W. Hom & Griffeth, 1991)
Unfolding Model	Knowledge worker receives a positive, negative, or neutral "shock" that puts him on a decision path: follow a pre-existing script he has encountered before; reassess if he wants to remain with the organization, assess how much he wants to become a member of another organization; in the absence of a shock, over the course of time he realizes that there is a disconnect between himself and the current job.	(T. W. Lee & Maurer, 1997)

The work on turnover is generally quantitative in nature. It includes the operationalization of constructs and creation of instruments (Alutto, Hrebiniak, & Alonso, 1973;

Brayfield & Rothe, 1951; Brierley, 1996; Fjortoft & Lee, 1994; Reichers, 1985; Steers, 1977).

Sophisticated statistical analyses of the determinants of turnover and their interactions characterize the literature (P. W. Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Huselid & Day, 1991), while meta-analyses have become popular in determining the generalizability of models and the nuances of relationships between variables (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Gaertner, 1999; Hellman, 1997; P. W. Hom et al., 1992; Steel & Griffeth, 1989; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993) A summary of critical variables and their interrelationships relationships are displayed in Table 2 (next page).

Table 2

Independent Variable	Action	Dependent Variable	Author
Job and organizational factors	<i>predict</i>	job satisfaction and organizational commitment.	(Karsh, Booske, & Sainfort, 2005)
Organizational commitment and job satisfaction	<i>predict</i>	turnover intentions.	
A learning organization	<i>is associated with</i>	job satisfaction and reduced intent to turnover.	(Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004)
Perceptions of bias and political maneuvering in the performance appraisal process	<i>predict</i>	reduced job satisfaction.	(Poon, 2004)
Reduced job satisfaction	<i>predicts</i>	intent to turnover.	(Steel & Ovalle, 1984)
Behavioral intentions	<i>predict</i>	turnover.	
Job satisfaction and tenure	<i>predict</i>	intent to turnover.	(van Breukelen, van der Vlist, & Steensma, 2004)
Ease of movement to a new position (whether market factors or personal movement capital)	<i>impacts</i>	job satisfaction.	(Trevor, 2001) (Gerhart, 1990)
Job satisfaction	<i>predicts</i>	intent to turnover.	(Trevor, 2001)
Work environment Job satisfaction	<i>impacts</i> <i>predicts</i>	job satisfaction intent to turnover	(Lambert et al., 2001)
Job satisfaction	<i>has no causal relationship in any direction with</i>	Organizational commitment	(Currivan, 1999)
Professional commitment	<i>impacts</i>	intent to leave profession	(Blau & Lunz, 1998)
Age, tenure, pay, overall job satisfaction, and employment perceptions	<i>correlate reliably with</i>	turnover	(Cotton & Tuttle, 1986)
Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job stressors (overwork, unclear expectations, issues with supervisor)	<i>predict</i>	intent to turnover	(Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004)
Job satisfaction	<i>predicts</i>	intent to turnover.	(Hellman, 1997)
Distributive justice, supervisory support, and chances for promotion	<i>directly correlate with</i>	organizational commitment.	(Gaertner, 1999) (Hendrix, Robbins, Miller, & Summers, 1998)
Emotional exhaustion	<i>correlates with</i>	depersonalization, reduced professional commitment and intent to turnover.	(R. T. Lee & Ashforth, 1993)

Most of the research literature is not prescriptive, but the papers written by scholars and practitioners in particular professions reveal the importance of turnover research. The negative impact of professional turnover is bad enough, as evidenced by the fallout during times of high nurse turnover; the quality of patient care goes down and the nursing unit experiences low morale and lower levels of productivity (Hayes et al., 2006). It would not be surprising to find similar outcomes within the parameters of the library, namely poor customer service, low departmental morale, and less productivity.

The benefits of retention and professional commitment are reasons enough to apply turnover research to the library profession. LIS educators who are charged with the academic preparation of librarians, many of whom will continue to do research in the field, will need to be mindful of their students' potential long term impact to the profession. Increasing their sense of professional commitment has many positive benefits beyond reduced turnover, not the least of which is higher rates of academic research productivity (Jauch, Glueck, & Osborn, 1978). Other research has shown that pharmacy students who were satisfied with their intellectual development and their level of faculty and peer group interaction at the end of their first academic year had higher rates of professional commitment (Fjortoft & Lee, 1994).

If librarians leave the profession due to a mismatch of expectations and reality upon leaving the academy and entering the workplace, it is imperative that LIS educators work to correct this gap and provide new librarians with a reasonable portrait of all library settings and, especially for younger students who have little professional experience of any kind, a realistic picture of the world of work, of supervisors, and of customers. Abigail Zuger, in a 2004 *New England Journal of Medicine* special report, registers concern for the increasing professional discontent among US physicians. She writes, "the key to restoring a sense of contentment to the

medical profession may lie in the hands of educators who encourage students to have more accurate expectations...” (p. 74). LIS educators would do well to heed this advice.

While theories and models of employee turnover help to explain the process of voluntary job abandonment, they are not sufficient for uncovering the complex external and internal factors that make librarians want to leave the profession. The perspective of employers eager to retain their best employees should also be obtained.

Retention in Business, Teaching, and Librarianship

This section will discuss retention strategies of employers in three realms – business, teaching, and librarianship. The professional literature on retention is utilitarian in nature, defining problems in and describing methods to improve retention of employees. As a rule, this type of literature contains checklists, surveys, worksheets, and exemplary forms or documents on the subject, several of which will be used in the development of interview questions described in the Methodology section.

A plethora of popular business management books exists on the subject of retaining employees (Branham, 2001; Dibble, 1999; Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005; Phillips & Connell, 2003; *Retaining your best people*, 2006). These works are directed toward a readership of upper- and mid-level managers interested in improving retention rates in their companies. The authors suggest ways to change a company's environment into one in which employees want to remain. This popular management literature focuses on retaining people in jobs, not professions, but is nevertheless useful in pointing out the reasons why people tend to stay with or leave their employers.

The historical context of retention is important to mention briefly. Dibble (1999) discusses how employer-employee relations have changed since the 1950s, a time of employee

loyalty, employer paternalism, security, and entitlement. She points out that over the last fifty years major shifts in the global economy and national economic policies, deregulation, and massive technological change have resulted in a new model of “at-will” employment. Skilled workers have multiple job offers and choices about where to work. Employers have to recognize that they are competing for talent and must have an attractive work environment to offer potential candidates. Today's professionals have traded job security for a broader selection of opportunities, and no longer trust employers to be loyal to them or provide them with a “job-for-life.” Suspicion and distrust of employers is common.

Given that employees have a great deal of choice about where to work, they are more likely to look for employers who meet a variety of needs. At the bare minimum, these needs include, predictably, a competitive salary and benefits package, transparent promotion ladders and bonus structures, and ongoing training and development. Benefits such as a flexible work schedule, job rotation or sharing, recognition of life balance issues, and family-friendly policies are becoming more of an expectation than a special indulgence. Branham (2001) describes the trend for “progressive companies” such as SAS Institute to go to extraordinary lengths to insure the happiness of their employees. At-work perks such as on-site daycare, recreational facilities, and no limit on sick days play a role in SAS's 3.7 percent turnover rate, 17 points below the IT industry average (p. 31).

The management literature outlines a process by which the right employees are hired and retained. Employers should expend the effort up front to delineate clearly the job for which they are seeking a candidate, and then get a good fit at the time of hire. The company should be able to convey a clear vision and strategy to new hires. Supervisors must be able to coach and mentor their employees using proven techniques to support their growth with the company. Tyrannical

managers and toxic co-workers or work environments that are disrespectful of diversity and human decency are obviously not conducive to successful retention programs. Appropriately challenging assignments, as well as incentive plans with rewards and recognitions that boost employee morale are also recommended. Understanding turnover and retention is simple for an organization, according to Branham, because it is to “treat others as they would like to be treated” and to be a culture of commitment rather than a culture of abuse (pp. 19, 23).

The K-12 teaching profession is notorious for high rates of attrition. Nearly 25% of new teachers exit the profession within the first four years (Benner, 2000; Rowan, 2002). Not surprisingly, teacher retention is addressed frequently in both the research and professional literature in education. Educational research on retention will be examined in more detail below, but first the professional literature will be discussed.

The typical work on teacher retention closely resembles the management literature in that it serves as a “how-to manual” for school administrators and teacher-mentors who want to be proactive in keeping teachers in their schools (Boyer, 2004; Chauncey, 2005; Podsen, 2002). For example, Podsen's guide conceptualizes the teaching career as a “professional career framework” with distinct stages that can be nurtured by administrators, mentors, and the school culture. The onus is on the school leadership to develop, implement, and support programs that meet the needs of a teacher at each stage of her career. While schools may not be able to supply the financial rewards and at-work perks of industry, they should be able to meet many vital intangible needs such as coaching, recognition, development, peer support networks, outlets for reflection, and a positive work environment.

Librarianship has a long history of practical professional literature that addresses the various problems of library administrators in all kinds of libraries. These pragmatic works are

useful in the design of programs and management of employees, and librarians often utilize them prior to implementing new processes or systems. Academic librarianship has its own prototypical manual called the SPEC Kit which addresses an issue of concern to academic libraries and is based on survey data from members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Published by ARL six times per year, the topical kit contains the results of the survey, analysis, related policies or procedures, and other documents from the surveyed libraries.

The *Recruitment and Retention SPEC Kit* (Stevens & Streatfeild, 2003) resulted from a 2003 survey to determine issues and concerns related to recruitment and retention of academic librarians. While academic libraries are not representative of all libraries and the survey is from the perspective of management, it is important to note that the findings echo those mentioned in the management and education literature. Respondents were asked to select five factors that had “the most positive impact on retaining librarians at different stages of their careers.” 68% of administrators responded that for early-career librarians it is support for professional development. 46% indicated that salary was an important factor, followed by work environment (41%), mentoring (35%), potential for promotion (33%), and relationship with the supervisor (30%) (p. 12). Responses about mid- and late-career librarians do not differ significantly, except that support for professional development drops to 62% and 42%, respectively (pp. 26-27). It would be interesting to find out if librarians who have left the profession did so because of their former employer's inability to provide those conditions ARL library administrators deem important for retention.

Leaving the Professions, or, This Isn't What I Signed Up For...

The literature on leaving specific professions is sparse, but informative. A professional in most fields has devoted years to education, training, and the development of a career; to turn her

back on that career is a major decision that often results from compelling circumstances.

Regardless of field, the reasons for leaving seem to fall into several universal categories, which will be apparent in the following “snapshots” of the professions, at their worst.

The last days of *social work careers* are characterized by burnout due to emotional exhaustion. Long hours and heavy workloads in a stressful environment with difficult clients take their toll on a caring professional. Those individuals who become too close to the personal problems of clients or who have issues with self esteem or boundaries are particularly prone to burnout. Social workers burdened with tedious administrative tasks who lack defined roles and support from supervisors or coworkers are likely to abandon their careers (Center for Health Workforce Studies, 2006; Lyons, La Valle, & Grimwood, 1995).

The “helping” professions are often physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing, and *nursing* is no exception. Nurses, like social workers, tend to become emotionally exhausted. Unmanageable workloads and schedules, coupled with poor management or micromanagement results in a nurse who cannot perform at optimal levels. A work environment in which management fails to communicate clearly, enlist the participation of the nurses, give praise and recognition, and offer opportunities for growth and promotion usually will have a big problem with turnover. Certain clinical environments may have increased turnover, such as oncology units, where patient relationships can be emotionally draining (Gardulf et al., 2005; Hayes et al., 2006; Rambur, Palumbo, McIntosh, & Mongeon, 2003).

Teachers in elementary, middle, and secondary education, especially those just beginning their career, are seriously at risk for professional turnover. Large class sizes, a negative or violent school culture, student misbehavior, low salaries, and administrative bureaucracies are difficult obstacles to negotiate, even for seasoned teachers. Unfortunately, new

teachers are not always coached by mentor-teachers, leaving them to feel isolated, overwhelmed and unsupported. Expectations are not always clearly defined by administrators, and a new teacher does not always leave his student teaching practicum with a realistic picture of what to anticipate that first year on his own (Smithers & Robinson, 2003).

Physicians in private practice, large clinics, and hospitals feel increasingly hampered by the changes associated with managed care and large insurance conglomerates (Hoff, 2000). Young doctors are disillusioned (Paice, 1997). Many of them believe that their autonomy and control has been eroded by bureaucracy, and that they are being “de-professionalized,” in that they are not the final authority in decisions regarding patient care. The perceived “prestige” factor is also dwindling, as a result of the administrative tasks for which they are now responsible and the non-medical roles they must assume. The proportion of their income that doctors pay for malpractice insurance has caused some to change to specialties that are less risky, and less expensive. Many practice “defensive medicine,” ordering extra tests to cover all eventualities in the case of a lawsuit. Increasingly heavy workloads and a too-fast pace is causing physicians to question why they remain in the profession. 30-40% wouldn’t choose the profession again or encourage others to do so (Zuger, 2004, p. 69).

Even prestigious *law and engineering professions* see their share of leavers. New lawyers are demoralized by having to deal with aggression and demands from senior lawyers. Some court-appointed attorneys believe that laws and funding issues often impede their ability to defend clients as they deem necessary. Corporate lawyers, beholden to shareholders, CEOs, and the bottom line experience burnout (Ranalli, 2003). Engineers have two unique problems to deal with: competition from foreign workers in the United States who can be paid less and offshore outsourcing of projects needing engineering expertise. Layoffs and instability in the profession

do not make it as attractive and secure as in the past. Lightning-fast changes in technology mean that extremely technical and specialized expertise is short-lived, and engineers are constantly threatened with extinction in their niche (T. W. Lee & Maurer, 1997; Seteroff, 1997).

Little is known about why *librarians* leave, but several studies show how similar librarianship is to the other helping professions outlined above. In her study of academic librarians' work values and their relationship to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention, Barbara Burd (2003) found that librarians "in organizations that support participatory management, open communication, opportunities for achievement, and relationships built on honesty and trust, are more satisfied and committed, and less likely to leave" (p. 7). Career commitment is a key to longevity in the profession (Millard, 2003).

Luzius and Ard (2006) found that former academic librarians, who had been out of librarianship for an average of seven years, left the field because of dissatisfaction with one or more of the following areas: work environment, compensation, job responsibilities, obstacles to promotion, image of the field, and personal or other reasons. 44% of respondents said they would return to the field under the right conditions. Although the study was small (n=18), it serves as a useful starting point in this type of research.

Other problematic areas that might impact turnover are bureaucracy, budgetary issues, poor supervision and leadership, faculty status, and burnout. Faculty status for academic librarians may require a diversion of time and energy away from personal pursuits as well as from the day-to-day duties of the library (Hoggan, 2003), causing feelings of overwork and overwhelm. Burnout among bibliographic instruction librarians has been attributed to a lack of training and educational preparation for their roles as instructors; LIS educators should be mindful of this fact, since burnout is a contributor to turnover.

Research Questions

This research project proposes to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. Who is most likely to leave librarianship?
- RQ2. What internal and external factors influence librarians to leave the profession?
- RQ3. What factors or circumstances might have prevented them from leaving the profession?
- RQ4. What factors might induce their later return to the profession?
- RQ5. Are these factors (RQ 2, 3, 4) consistent over time, geography, and types of library?
- RQ6. Do librarians who leave believe that their educational program in library science played some role in their later attrition?
- RQ7. Do librarians who leave know of ways that their educational program could have better prepared them for the workplace?
- RQ8. Who wanted to leave librarianship, but didn't? [only for larger study]
- RQ9. What internal and external factors prevented them (in RQ8) from leaving? [only for larger study]

Methodology

Pending UNC Institutional Review Board approval, participants will be recruited using a snowball sampling technique. This statistical sampling technique involves the recruitment of new participants by existing study participants; the technique is often used when locating subjects who meet a particular criteria is extremely difficult using conventional sampling methods. Several former librarians will be asked to participate, and will be asked to recruit to the study other former librarians whom they know, and subsequently, new participants will recruit others. Recruitment will continue until a sample of 10-15 is formed. For the purposes of the study, a former librarian is someone who holds a Masters degree in Library Science, who has

worked as a professional librarian in a public, academic, school, or special library, and who no longer works in a library setting.

The researcher will conduct individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. Questions will be open-ended, and designed to provoke lengthy, reflective answers. The specific questions are currently in development, but when completed will address the participant's full library career. A typical interview will likely be an informal conversation about things such as the person's job duties, work environments, relationships with supervisors and colleagues, job satisfaction, and the reasons for leaving particular jobs and librarianship. Interviews will be sound recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed, possibly using NViva or similar qualitative analysis software. The goal of data analysis is to identify themes and trends related to permanent professional turnover.

After the pilot study is completed, the entire study design will be examined for problems such as scope, imprecision of definitions, underlying weaknesses in assumptions or theoretical underpinnings, problematic questions or questioning techniques, and quality of coding structure. The feasibility and desirability of replicating this study with a larger sample will be finally determined. By the end of this study, data will have been collected from the WILIS pilot and alumni surveys, and it will be evident whether leavers of the profession can be identified, and a sample drawn from the WILIS respondents to participate in the later study. Finally, the research questions will be refined, and the semi-structured interview questions will be revised and finalized. A full research proposal will then be drafted and submitted to a dissertation committee for approval.

Discussion

This pilot study is the first stage of a larger, dissertation-length study. Its main limitation is its small, non-random sample. However, the larger study would utilize a larger, random sample drawn from the WILIS study respondents, and will benefit immeasurably from the discovery and repair of any design, implementation, and analysis flaws of the pilot. The challenges to the researcher of this initial study will undoubtedly improve the quality of later work. The pilot study will ultimately determine if it is possible, using qualitative methods, to identify the factors influencing librarians to leave. Use of the life course perspective, the theories and statistical models for voluntary turnover, along with the professional literature on retention, will allow for the creation of better questions to pose to the study participants. Differences among different types of librarians and other demographic variables will be analyzed, and factors will be compared with previous turnover research in other disciplines.

It is hoped that completed research in this area will enhance the knowledge base of LIS educators, professional librarians, and library administrators and through them, eventually improve the “quality of life” in the profession. The words of librarians who have left may inform LIS educators who can create realistic expectations of the workplace for future practitioners. New librarians, learning from the experience of former colleagues, might become empowered to ask for or create the changes in the workplace that are needed. Finally, library administrators will gain new information to create work environments and retention programs that keep their best employees.

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