

Brown, Alison (2016) An exploratory study investigating the impact of a university module that aims to challenge students' perspectives on ageing and older adults. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 10 (2). pp. 25-39.

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**An exploratory study investigating the  
impact of a university module that aims to  
challenge students' perspectives on ageing  
and older adults**

Practitioner Research  
In Higher Education  
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University of Cumbria  
Vol 10 (2) pages 25-39

Alison Brown  
University of Cumbria

**Abstract**

This study aimed to assess if a module on an undergraduate degree programme had challenged students' perspectives on ageing and older adults. Courses on gerontology are on the increase within the UK to support increasingly ageing populations, with agendas to promote ethical care and to challenge the incidence of elderly abuse. Research consistently reports society's often negative attitudes towards older people, with this in mind a module on a gerontology programme at a North West of England University focused on developing a range of activities whereby students enrolled on the programme would be able to challenge their existing attitudes towards older adults. Interviews were undertaken with 3 students to explore if attitude change had occurred within a framework of social psychological definitions of attitudes and transformative learning. 3 main themes emerged from the interviews, these were: 1. The relationship between beliefs and the development of attitudes, 2. Attitude change challenging morality and 3. Transformation and motivation to act. One of the student's sharing also led to the creation of an attitude time-line which plotted the students changing attitudes over time. The findings of the study have informed future teaching practice and may support methods that support critical reflection and transformative attitude change in other disciplines within higher education.

**Keywords**

Higher Education, attitude change, critical reflection, transformative learning.

**Introduction**

This research project was initiated from reflecting on the progress of a new module entitled 'Experiences and Perspectives of Ageing.' The aim of the module is to provide students with a range of resources and opportunities to explore how different individuals experience ageing, and a further aim is that students critically reflect on their existing attitudes and assumptions and hopefully challenge and transform them in some significant way. The range of resources include videos of interviews with older adults sharing their life stories, research projects that have assessed quality of life in older adults, the students also have to interview older adults in person and they observe older adults in their local communities.

The module is part of the curriculum composing an undergraduate degree entitled 'Working with Older Adults' (WWOA). The 3 main aims of the course are to:

1. Challenge current negative social attitudes towards older adults and ageing...
2. To encourage active ageing, and...
3. To inform effective practice when working with those living with dementia.

The degree was developed in response to the needs of a growing ageing population and to counter societal ageism. Ageism has been defined as 'negative attitudes or behaviours towards an individual

**Citation**

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solely based on that person's age' (Greenberg et al., 2002:27), or ageism specifically in relation to older adults was defined by Butler (1969) as the classification of older people as 'senile, rigid in thought and manner, [and] old-fashioned in morality and skills.' Gerontology-focused degrees and modules are increasing in higher education, with aims to challenge attitudes and beliefs about older adults for health and social care students (Collier & Foster, 2014; Lovell, 2006) as researchers such as Koh et al. (2014) have discovered that the field of gerontology is least favoured by health and social care students.

The link between negative attitudes towards older adults and subsequent ageist behaviour is well supported in the literature (Sijuwade, 2009; Matsuda, 2007), if we consider Eagly & Chaiken (2007:586), who state that 'attitude is . . . a tendency or latent property of the person that gives rise to judgments as well as to many other types of responses such as emotions and overt behaviours' the relationship between attitudes and behaviour becomes clear.

Many educationalists argue that an aim of education should focus on the positive development of attitudes, beliefs and values particularly where graduates will be working with the public, for example Mezirow (1990 quoted in Mountford, 2005:225) the founder of transformative learning theory argues that, 'educators who administer programs for the public have a professional obligation to foster transformative learning by offering challenging programs designed to encourage learners to critically examine internalized social norms and cultural codes in courses and workshops'.

This sentiment is also shared by Sterling (2001 cited in McEwen, Strachan & Lynch, 2011) who suggests that education should focus on sustainability objectives and the development of local and global citizenship; Sterling also uses the term 'transformative' when discussing the aims of education for sustainable development.

There appears to be tangible links between transformative learning theory and education that focuses on sustainable development, both the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Quality Assurance Association (QAA) are incorporating sustainability into policy documents to inform higher education. The 2014 document entitled 'Education for sustainable development: Guidance for UK higher education providers' explains that Education for sustainable development is 'the process of equipping students with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.' (HEA, 2014:14). This document is relevant to the WWOA programme, particularly linking in the objectives of sustainability in relation to 'think(ing) about issues of social justice, ethics and wellbeing' and 'develop(ing) a future future-facing outlook; learning to think about the consequences.' Both these points form key components of the Working with Older Adults programme.

From the perspective of transformative learning theory and education for sustainable development, and supported by current agendas from both the QAA and HEA there is a very real need to assess and evaluate changes to students' attitudes towards older adults. This study uses the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1996) to examine a small group of students' attitudes towards older adults and ageing in general, to determine if and how their attitudes have changed. Qualitatively investigating 'how' their attitudes have changed may inform the process of attitude transformation for future cohorts of students.

### **Literature review**

#### *Societal and cultural attitudes*

An attitude can be defined as 'a mindset or a tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience and temperament,' (Pickins, 2005:44). Social learning theory (Bandura,

1972) has determined that individual's attitudes are heavily influenced by stereotypes (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). A stereotype is defined as 'sets of traits ascribed to social groups...used to predict and explain behaviour' (Stephan, 1985:600). Many stereotypes are connected to the elderly (e.g., Cuddy, Norton & Fiske, 2005; Gold, Arbuckle & Andres, 1994) including the positive stereotype of the grandparent figure; with character traits of capability, wisdom and being family orientated, as opposed to the negative stereotype of the impaired older adult; being senile, fragile and dependent on family (Schmidt & Boland, 1986). These stereotypes are present in media sources; film and TV and condition individuals into creating socially shared beliefs and attitudes about society and groups of individuals in society (Chen, 2015).

Terror management theory (TMT) (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986) offer an explanation for the existence of prejudice towards older adults. This existential theory proposes that ageism occurs because humans unlike other mammals are uniquely equipped with a cerebral cortex which provides the ability to have knowledge of our own future ageing and inevitable death. Becker argued in 1973, that fear of death is the primary drive behind human behaviour, and TMT has contributed to this field by proposing that older adults in our society are the closest representations to death, particularly based on stereotypical messages from society and culture via sources such as the media, where ageing is often associated with physical and mental decline, less life satisfaction and less social interaction (Coudin & Alexopoulos, 2010). Because we unconsciously associate older adults with death, as a coping mechanism TMT argues that we then distance ourselves from older adults to avoid the terrifying reminder of our own inevitable deaths.

Studies such as Martens et al. (2005) have utilised the theory when examining students' attitudes towards older adults and subsequent ageist attitudes and found evidence to support TMT, whereas Chonody et al.'s (2014) research with Australian social work students discovered that fear of ageing rather than fear of death resulted in greater negative prejudice towards the elderly.

These conflicting findings suggest that the relationship between fear of death and incidence of ageism is more complex and requires more exploratory qualitative methodologies to examine these relationships in more detail.

### **Transformative learning**

Jack Mezirow first introduced his concept of Transformative learning in 1978 as a theory of adult learning. He documented the experiences of older adults returning to education, finding that many had experienced what he termed perspective transformations. Perspective or what Mezirow termed 'frames of reference' consist of 'structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions (Taylor, 2008:5). A perspective transformation led to what Mezirow (1996:163) described as 'a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference . . . one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience.' Due to these proposed positive outcomes transformative learning has become desirable in higher education.

Many studies have assessed a range of pedagogical approaches planned to promote perspective transformations in how older people are perceived. Health and social care courses that involve placements in gerontology settings are well documented in the literature, such as Gelman's (2012) study that examined Australian Social Work students or Corrigan, McNamara and O'Hara (2013) study that investigated the effects of intergenerational learning between higher education students and older adult students, whereby the younger students acted as mentors to facilitate the development of IT skills. Other pedagogical approaches to effect perspective transformation include the use of fictional 'older adult' case studies (Lavera & Croxon, 2015) and interviews with older

adults (Ligon et al. 2009). These 5 different approaches were found to be effective in triggering changes in frames of reference that were more inclusive and accepting of older adults.

Again in keeping with attitude studies, studies investigating transformative learning in association with gerontology often utilise quantitative pre-post-test measures to assess perspective transformation via measuring changes in attitude and beliefs (e.g. Duthie & Donaghey, 2009; Jahan et al., 2015). For these types of studies quantitative data demonstrates clearly if attitude change has occurred, however rich data that explores in more detail how students' attitudes have changed and in response to what specifically is less evident from these studies; a qualitative methodology is necessary to elicit this type of information. Based on this, the aims of the present research study are:

- Does the WWOA degree programme lead to perspective transformation and attitude change?
- What causes the changes?
- How have these changes occurred over time?

### **Methodology and method**

For the present research project, a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews was adopted, the aim being to examine in more detail how students' attitudes have changed and in response to what specifically. The theoretical framework that guides the researcher is social constructivist in that knowledge and attitudes are socially constructed rather than biologically determined and particularly pedagogical constructivism which Bryant et al. (2012:434) explain 'takes as its basic premise the notion that learning is an active process,' with learners coming into education equipped with their own knowledge. A humanistic approach is also adopted in that the researcher's teaching and researching focus is the students' personal and professional development, aiming for learning environments that are supportive and collaborative (Gillespie, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as most appropriate for this research project, because as Tracy (2012:127) notes the process of participating in an interview triggers reflection for both the interviewer and interviewee, and critical reflection was a requirement of one of the learning outcomes for the module under investigation. The learning outcome asks the students to 'Critically reflect on your changing attitudes towards older adults'. Based on this, the researcher was hopeful that the participating students would engage in critical reflection and meaning-making through the interview that potentially could be incorporated into the reflective section of their summative essays. This potential 'value' could be viewed as an ethically beneficent outcome for the participant. Beneficence towards the participants was a major consideration in this project; Participant information sheets and informed consent documentation was shared and completed with each participant, and an ethics proposal form was completed and agreed with the University ethics committee. I was mindful particularly of psychological distress that students could experience when sharing their attitudes (Townsend, Cox & Li 2010:626) and reminded students that if they found the interview distressing we could pause or stop at any time. As Keegan (2009:100) notes the interviewer must 'create an atmosphere that is conducive for participants to share their attitudes, behaviour, feelings and thoughts'.

To counteract weaknesses associated with qualitative interviews, such as researcher bias, the researcher was self-reflexive and mindful as to how my own personal context could influence the students' sharing (Tracy, 2012:129). Reflecting on my personal attitudes and expectations of the interviews; I was hopeful that students' attitudes would have changed, this is influenced by my position as module leader and changing attitudes is an explicit aim of this module. To counter this influence, I was mindful throughout the interviews of what Husserl termed 'reduction,' or

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'bracketing' (Erich, 2003:44), whereby the researcher 'temporarily suspends taken for granted assumptions and presuppositions' about the phenomena being studied.

The study adopted a purposeful sampling approach; 3 students were interviewed. In recognition of the sampled group, the study adopted a semi-structured interview plan, so comparisons could be made between participants (Tracy, 2012:). However, questions were kept to a minimum and threads generated by the student rigorously explored to counter the weaknesses of semi-structured interviews as noted by Tracy (2012) that set questions lead to less spontaneous and unexpected answers emerging.

The interview questions are presented in Figure 1. The first 2 questions were asked in order with all three participants but the order of the following questions occurred when relevant in relation to students' responses.

1. Why did you decide to come on this degree 'Working with OA's?' (Older Adults)
2. What was your experience of OA's before coming onto the course? Do you have close relationships with OA's? What are they like? What's your relationship like? How do you think they influence how you feel about elderly people in general.
3. If I were to ask you what topics on the course have influenced how you think about OA's could you tell me what those topics were and in what way they've changed how you think about OA's.
4. Have topics on the course influenced how you think about society? In what way?
5. What would you say are the biggest changes to your knowledge and understanding in general? How has that new understanding affected your attitudes (cognitively (what you think), affectively (how you feel) and behaviourally (how you act or behave).
6. Have you had any strong emotional responses to things you've learnt either through your reading and completion of assignments at home or during class? Can you describe what the emotional response was like? Why do you think it had such an effect on you?
7. Has anything you've read or been taught surprised or shocked you or upset you? In what way? Why do you think you found it shocking?
8. How do you feel about getting older –reaching 60, 70, 80, close your eyes and imagine yourself at this age, what images come to mind? How do you feel in relation to these images?
9. What do you hope for in older age? What would be important to you? Did you think about this before the degree?
10. What do you think/feel about your experience of learning in general in University? Is it a positive experience? Is it negative? Why is it those things?

**Figure 1.** Interview schedule.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The participants provided their informed consent for interviews to be audio-recorded. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim and data analysis was undertaken by the researcher. The researcher recognises Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) point that qualitative data analysis is interpretative and multiple possible meanings are bound into the data, and that the information that emerges from interviews is mutually created via the interviewer and interviewee and contextual in that moment. The researcher was guided by Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) article on how to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative content analysis, and utilised their data analysis techniques such as identifying 'meaning units' across participants and aiming to 'condense' the verbatim text into manageable units that preserve the core message.

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The first two questions in the semi-structured interview provided the context and history of the students' attitudes, as each student shared their motivations to enrol on the degree and their former relationships with older adults in childhood. This structure provided a contextual framework to explore how students' attitudes had changed over time, Auerbach and Silverstine (2003:16) have defined this research method as a narrative interview, as the format of questions take the participant through their history with the phenomenon under study. The tripartite model of attitude formation (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) consisting of cognitive, affective and behavioural elements also provided a framework to examine the participants' attitudes in more detail and informed the analysis of the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This model is well supported in attitude literature (Bagozzi, Tybout, Craig & Sternthal, 1979; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

### **Findings and discussion**

3 women participated in the interviews; Participant 1 and 2 were in the age range 31-40, and Participant 3 was in the age range 21-25. They are numbered in order of their interview taking place.

3 main themes emerged from the interviews; they have been entitled:

1. Beliefs informing attitudes
2. Perspective transformation: challenging morality
3. Motivation to act

The final section of this discussion is the proposal of an 'Attitude Time-line' utilising the Tripartite model of attitudes as a potential transformative learning aid for future health and social care students.

For all students their prior relationships with older adults were predominantly positive; they all had experienced relationships with warm affect, and this had influenced their motivation to enrol on the WWOA degree. All participants had experienced close relationships with older adults that countered the negative stereotype that ageing equates with infirmity and fragility. For participant 1 and 2 they shared that they compartmentalised these older adults as exceptions to the rule and as a child generally equated old age with the negative stereotype. Conversely, participant 3 was originally from a West African country, immigrating to Britain at age 11, she shared that she did not equate older adults with fragility and infirmity, and recounted examples of elderly people who continued to work throughout old age.

#### *1. Beliefs informing attitudes*

All participants had experienced perspective transformation and not always in the way I had envisaged; for each participant it was evident that there was a relationship between how new knowledge had caused revision of former beliefs and then these new beliefs had transformed their perspective or attitude. Table 1. attempts to convey this progression for each of the 3 students, for Participant 1 she shared that knowledge of stereotypes had caused her to question norms in life such as 'being old equates with fragility and infirmity and support must be offered to the elderly.' For this student understanding that human cognition tends to categorise and simplify our perception into stereotypes (Augoustinos & Walker 1998) led her to really enjoy 'picking apart' social norms to perceive her existence in 'more depth' and complexity, she used the term 'picking apart' several times throughout her interview and it reflected a developing critical post-modernist approach to her studies (Whatley & Dyck 2000).

Participant 2. mirrored Participant 1. and shared that knowledge of attitudes had led to perspective transformation. She had begun to critically question the phenomenon of ageing, particularly what

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has been termed 'social ageing,' whereby social attitudes regarding old age determine how older adults age (Collins, 2014). The student shared that she had begun to 'question everything' – such as the term 'old-age pensioner', or predictably buying Christmas presents that are traditionally bought for older adults such as 'slippers and pipe for her Grandad or royal jelly bath products for her Grandmother'. She had begun to critically analyse what was the possible impact of these societal messages and attitudes 'en-masse,' and she reflected on those decisions and questioned if she was making those choices based on what her grandparents really desired or what society dictated. She shared that she felt hopeful for the future in that societal attitudes were changing.

Participant .3 shared that knowledge regarding approaches to good practice when working with people with dementia had indirectly triggered a perspective transformation. This student explained that she had begun to share her new knowledge to benefit people supporting family members with dementia, and she shared that she felt fulfilled as a consequence. Indirectly this act of sharing knowledge to benefit others (particularly people older than her) had led her to question deep-seated moral values present in her culture; namely is it always wholly positive for a younger person to demonstrate their respect to elders by 'never sharing their opinion' even if their opinion could support or help them in some way.

**Table 1.** Progression of perspective transformation.

Interviewee	Former belief or <i>premise</i> involving reflection	Revised belief	Stereotypical attitude Or <i>epistemic assumption</i>	Critical analysis and wider implications	New Diversity
1	Must show respect to older adults by offering help and support, this would involve standing to offer seat on the bus to an OA.	Now questions whether these indiscriminate offers of help lead to dependency and disempowerment	Older adults are infirm, frail and need support.	Does this indiscriminate help lead to dependency, deconditioning and disempowerment ?	Assess first and then offer help discriminately
2	Buying gifts that are marketed 'older adults'	Now considering alternative gifts for older adults	Old people all like the same old people presents.	Do older adults really want 'older adult' branded products or is society conditioning them to believe they want them. What are the long-term effects of this social conditioning into old age?	Ask the older adult what they would prefer
3	Respect must be shown to older adults; a younger person's opinion is not relevant.	Younger people do have valuable information to share.	All older adults are wise, younger people are unexperienced and foolish.	There are possible negative consequences if younger people's valuable contributions are dismissed.	Share your opinions – but...adopt an appropriate approach (not antagonistic)

\*terms in italics are Mezirow and Taylor's (2009) terms used in perspective transformation.



For all students, perspective transformation involved triggering changes in long-held beliefs previously unquestioned, they had begun to question what Mezirow (2000:18) has termed 'habits of mind,' or 'the assumptions we receive and assume from our culture.' For all participants it seemed that the perspective transformation held more impact because it was something long taken for granted, for one student she shared that her new knowledge was 'glaringly obvious' to her now. Perspective transformation involved a reflective component for all interviewees, the acquisition of knowledge, either via lectures or reading combined with reflection on past history and events, led to perspective transformation. Allen (2007:30) agrees and states that 'Transformative learning theory focuses on an adult learner's ability to reflect and make new meaning of experiences and environments.'

## 2. *Challenging morality*

It was evident for two of the participants that their previous long-held beliefs and attitudes held a very moralistic undertone, and both students shared that despite their new knowledge and perspective change, they would still reflexively stand for an older person on the bus, or be very careful when conflicting with an older person's opinions. So despite experiencing cognitive perspective transformation it seems that behavioural transformation is more difficult to overcome; their original behaviour would still automatically be activated. Pavlova (2013:124) suggests that 'transformation could occur only if the deep feelings that accompanied the original perspective are to be dealt with.' For one student she said she would 'feel terrible' if she didn't stand, the other student displayed signs of fear when discussing opposing an older adult. Cranton and Carusetta (2004:24) state that a reconciliation needs to occur between the old and new frames of reference or perspectives; this reconciliation occurs through engaging in discourse with others and trying on new roles. And then the individual 'reintegrate(s) the new learning and way of knowing into their previous understanding'. For these two students this is evidently work in progress. However, if we consider Mezirow and Taylor's (2009:22) definition of transformative learning as 'learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change', both students provided examples of where they would discriminate or discern when or how to apply their new frames of reference (see Table 1. final column). The students seem to be responding to the nuances of the individual rather than indiscriminately to all older adults.

As Harmen (1998:10) shares 'every society ever known rests on some set of tacit basic assumptions about who we are, in what kind of universe we find ourselves and what is ultimately important to us'. It was evident that this group of students was in the process of questioning these tacit assumptions and moving towards what O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (2012:7) have termed 'personal authority' or what Kegan (1994:185) termed 'self-authorship,' whereby individuals create their own values and beliefs. Mezirow and Taylor propose this is the epistemology of transformative learning (2009:23).

## 3. *Motivation to act*

As a consequence of their perspective transformations all students expressed motivation to act; to make positive changes. Phrases used to express this were 'a drive to re-address the balance', as one student commented that 'society was unfair', another student shared that she now had 'confidence to share knowledge to help people'. Participant 1 and 2 shared examples where they were challenging their children's comments that reflected negative stereotypical attitudes and beliefs regarding older adults; aiming instead to instil positive portrayals of ageing and older adults.

Both participants laughed when sharing their desire to begin social change via working with their children first, as though embarrassed at their inability to affect major social change, however positive conditioning of younger generations should be applauded. I reflected on this following the

interviews and considered the potential of utilising these 'driving' affective states to promote wider social change through embedding a 'service-learning activity' into the degree programme. Malone, Jones and Stallings (2002:61) are advocates of 'service-learning' which they define as 'an approach to teaching and learning that actively engages students in community service which is directly connected to academic course content.' Bringle and Hatcher (1996) outline that service learning needs to meet the community's needs and that it can foster civic responsibility. Malone, Jones and Stallings (2002) paper focused on college students tutoring younger students and many benefits were recorded such as increased confidence, perspective transformations and understanding course concepts through practice. These findings are in keeping with many other studies (Stewart & Allen 2011; Tobias, 2013).

Ageism has been argued to be one of the last discriminatory areas to be addressed. Taylor (2008) identified 4 types of transformative learning, the first 3 focused on personal transformation, whilst the fourth involves social transformation, reflecting Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogical theories of conscientisation and social emancipation, whereby education should aim to develop students' consciousness to transform reality. The 3 students in this study mirrored this model; they had experienced personal perspective transformations, and were experiencing a positive affective-motivational response to make positive changes in society. This was beginning with people in the immediate social circles, however future curriculum planning of the WWOA degree programme could support students with resources and opportunities to effect wider social change, a 'service-learning' element to the degree programme could work towards encompassing the HEA and QAA agenda for sustainable education (HEA, 2014).

#### *4. Attitude time-line utilising the tripartite model of attitudes*

Students discussed their changing attitudes utilising the tripartite model of attitude (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), which consists of 3 components: cognition, affect and behaviour. From the student's narratives; examples of affect included reminiscing on feeling indulged and cared for by older adults in their lives to the feeling of fear experienced as a child from the confused stare from an elderly neighbour with dementia. Examples of behaviour included supporting their father to provide lifts to church for infirm older adults, or visiting older adults in the local hospital with a friend. Examples of cognitive components included beliefs regarding the necessity to give utmost respect to 'elderlies' (the use of this term or colloquialism conveys respect) or beliefs connecting old age with fragility.

During the data analysis stage, a chronological attitude time-line began to emerge from the students' sharing; this was triggered to some extent by the structure of the interview questions, beginning first with:

1. Why did you decide to come on this degree 'Working with OA's?'
2. What was your experience of OA's before coming onto the course?
3. Do you have close relationships with OA's? What are they like?
4. What's your relationship like?
5. How do you think they influence how you feel about elderly people in general?

A pattern consisting of connections between cognitive elements, affect and behaviour overtime occurred first during the interviews as all students began to make sense of how their attitudes had evolved over time in response to incoming cognitive, affect and behavioural information, coalescing to the choices students were making in relation to their degree and within their personal lives.

In response to these emerging patterns I created an attitude 'time-line' for Participant 1 and populated it with comments and stories she shared during the interview. From the interview she

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had provided enough information to populate the age ranges from 0-10, 10-20 and 30-40. I then contacted the participant and she agreed that the chart depicted her 'attitude journey' correctly and also provided cognitive, affect and behavioural information for the 20-30 age range. This graph is depicted as Figure 1.

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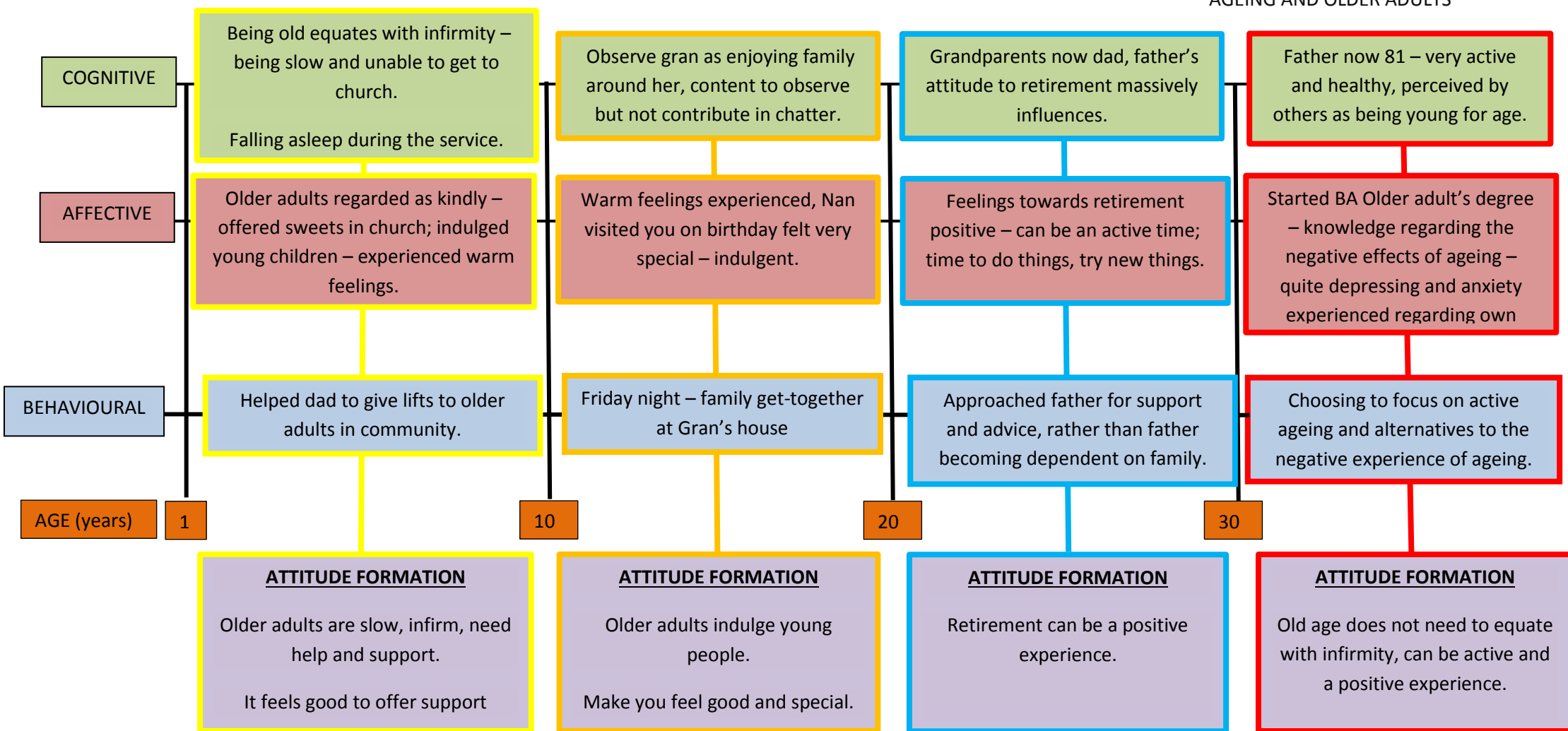


Figure 1. Attitude timeline using the tripartite model of attitude formation – Participant 1.

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Dalege et al. (2015:2) created the Causal Attitude Network model (CAN) to explore the structure and dynamics of attitudes by investigating the links between the 3 components in the tripartite model. They explain attitudinal evaluations consisting of interactions and reactions between beliefs, feelings and behavioural information, and Dalege et al. (2015:16) propose that 'attitude networks grow (i.e. new evaluative reactions attach to older evaluative reactions)...' and 'the structure of attitude growth will be driven by the similarity and popularity of evaluative reactions'.

It is evident from the attitude timeline in this study, that Participant 1. has experienced adapted attitudinal evaluations towards older adults. Similarities have remained the same, in that her attitude towards older adults remains positive, however her cognitive beliefs regarding negative stereotypes of poor ageing have been amended by her self-directed learning of alternative and positive experiences of ageing. Participant 1. shared that her choice to investigate positive experiences of ageing was motivated as a coping mechanism to deal with her own personal ageing, this supports terror-management theory and fear of ageing (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), however rather than leading to ageist attitudes, the student has amended her perception of ageing rather than distancing herself from older adults.

For future students it may be advantageous to share this time-line with them as an example and facilitate the creation of their own attitude 'time-line', where they plot events in their lives that have led to the development of their current attitudes towards older adults. In keeping with the tripartite model of attitudes it would be holistic to consider the 3 aspects of attitude formation – cognitive, affect and behaviour as it is noted in the literature that often measures to assess attitudes are uni-dimensional and lack validity due to this (e.g. Margono, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

This study discovered that some degree of perspective transformations had occurred for the 3 participants, it seemed that for all participants the perspective transformation was triggered by new knowledge; this led them to question long-held 'habits of mind' that often involved a moralistic undertone that students were currently engaged in resolving. The perspective transformation also triggered intrinsic motivations to act.

The findings in the present study support the tripartite model of attitude formation (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) and support the predictions made in Dalege et al.'s (2015) study that the inter-related reactions between cognitive, affect and behavioural information lead to existing attitude continuation or attitude change.

This study proposes that future students on the Working with Older adult degree programme are facilitated to create their own attitude timelines as undertaking this activity may lead to insight regarding their current attitudes towards older adults. As noted in the literature understanding the structure of attitudes and reflectively analysing where these attitudes came from could trigger critical reflection and personal transformation. The study has also led the researcher to reflect on how to develop the WWOA degree programme to encompass an element of service learning, which could utilise students' motivation to effect positive societal change.

Limitations of this study include the small sample size; the study lacks external reliability, however this was not the purpose of this study, but rather to assess if perspective transformation had occurred and if the findings could inform future teaching practice. Further research and application of the attitude formation time-line will determine if this tool has merit in supporting understanding of attitude formation and making sense of perspective transformations.

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A further limitation of this study was that only explicit attitudes were examined, disregarding implicit attitudes which Nash et al. (2014:54) defines as 'the immediate 'gut reaction' towards a subject before the person overlies it with a response that they believe to be more acceptable in practice.' For future studies it may be advantageous for students to undertake the Harvard Implicit Attitude Test (IAT) (Greenwald, Banaji & Nosek, 2011) and combine these results whilst exploring attitude changes.

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