

ALTERING NURSING STUDENT AND OLDER ADULT ATTITUDES THROUGH A POSSIBLE SELVES ETHNODRAMA



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The purpose of this mixed method study is to evaluate the effects of participation in the development and implementation of ethnodrama about possible selves on nursing student attitudes toward older adults and older adult attitudes to aging. Twelve nursing students and 12 older adult long-term care residents collaborated in a transformational learning experience involving interviews on the topic of possible selves culminating in the presentation of an ethnodrama developed from these data. Longitudinal data from student surveys about attitudes toward older adults were analyzed using growth modeling, whereas older adult pre-post data on attitudes toward aging were analyzed with a paired samples *t* test. Video of group discussions and open-ended feedback on the overall experience were analyzed to provide qualitative understanding of change in student attitudes over time. Although positive overall, student attitudes varied in initial status and rate of change. Students who interacted most frequently with older adults had more neutral attitudes. Older adult attitudes surrounding psychosocial loss improved over the course of the intervention. Normalizing attitudes may be as important as improving attitudes; neutrality may be more representative of realistic perceptions of older adults and late-life potential. (Index words: Nursing education; Arts-based intervention; Late-life potential; Attitude; Long-term care; Aging) *J Prof Nurs* 32:141–151, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

ADULTS AGED 65 and older are expected to represent 19.3% of the population by 2030 ([Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011](#)). Chronic disease was the leading cause of older adult mortality in 2006 ([Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2010](#)), and most older adults report living with one or more chronic conditions ([Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011](#)). Increased prevalence of chronic disease heightens the chance that older adults will experience functional decline and require health care ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Merck Company Foundation, 2007](#)). A large percentage of patients in all settings are older adults ([Institute of Medicine \[IOM\], 2008](#)).

Therefore, the rapidly aging U.S. population, including many older adults with chronic and debilitating illnesses,

will likely demand that more health care professionals receive geriatric training in order to meet the needs of the older adult population ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing & Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing, 2010; IOM, 2008](#)). One barrier to the expansion of geriatric health care providers is the limited desire of nursing students to work with older adults ([Lovell, 2006; Williams, Nowak, & Scobee, 2006; Wray & McCall, 2007](#)). Negative attitudes decrease nurses' desire to work in geriatrics that decreases quality of care for older adults by lowering the numbers of qualified nurses within all settings, increases turnover rates, and diminishes the numbers of future faculty adequately prepared to teach regarding geriatrics ([Brown, Nolan, Davies, Nolan, & Keady, 2008; IOM, 2008; Lovell, 2006; Wray & McCall, 2007](#)).

Attitudes Toward Older Adults

Attitudes are complex and multifaceted; the concept of attitude encompasses competence, evaluation, and stereotypes ([Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005](#)). Ageism, the evaluation of others through stereotypes based on age ([Butler, 1969](#)), holds that individual impressions of others are based on societal treatment of older adults, which influence the quality of life and experience of older adults. Many researchers have focused

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on attitudes toward older adults in an attempt to alter negative attitudes, assuming that this will change the influence of societal treatment toward the elderly (Mangen & Peterson, 1982).

Student Attitudes

Previous attempts to alter student attitudes toward older adults have focused on three general areas of research: (a) incorporating gerontological/geriatric content within the curriculum (Ferrario, Freeman, Nellett, & Scheel, 2008; Heise, Johnsen, Himes, & Wing, 2012; Williams, Anderson, & Day, 2007); (b) improving practicum experiences (Brown et al., 2008; White, Cartwright, & Lottes, 2012); and (c) promoting intergenerational interactions (Chase, 2011; Hernandez & Gonzalez, 2008).

There are mixed results as to the efficacy of these interventions. Attempts to alter attitudes took a positive approach by emphasizing (a) more interaction with older adults (Chase, 2011; Ferrario et al., 2008; Furze, Lohman, & Mu, 2008), (b) more education on aging (Funderburk, Damon-Rodrigues, Storms, & Solomon, 2006; Williams et al., 2007), and (c) improving older adult environments (Burbank, Dowling-Castronovo, Crowther, & Capezuit, 2006; White et al., 2012). In these studies, interactions and content tended to focus on healthy older adults and the positive aspects of aging.

Attempts to alter attitudes toward older adults can be seen as exhibiting a healthy aging bias. Interventions have not focused on the social discourse of aging, or altering perceptions of the meaning of later life, particularly in the context of older adults who are unhealthy, impaired, or institutionalized. By interacting with healthy older adults, the continuum of age and negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding aging individuals is being pushed back to a later age; those who are the young and healthy older adults are considered in a new light, but nothing changes for those who require more health services because of chronic illness. Real-world environments are not always healthy and positive, and it is only through an adjustment in perceptions of later life that students will be able to look beyond the negatives that currently influence their attitudes and desires to work with older adults who require more support.

Previous interventions have done little to shift how nursing students view older adults. In order to meet IOM (2008) recommendations to increase recruitment and training in geriatrics, interventions need to alter stigma associated with aging and create a workforce prepared to care and advocate for older adults. American Association of Colleges of Nursing competency statements for gerontological nursing recommend increasing positive attitudes toward older adults and the incorporation of a liberal arts education to aid creative approaches to patient-focused care (American Association of Colleges of Nursing & Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to develop and implement an intervention designed to increase positive perceptions of capacity and aging among a sample of nursing students and older adults living in long-term care. Two theories were

used to guide the alteration of attitudes: transformative learning theory that utilizes discourse and self-reflection to transform understanding through inter- and intrapersonal experience (Cranton, 2002; Matthew-Maich, Ploeg, Jack, & Dobbins, 2010; Mezirow, 1997) and the theory of possible selves, which is the idea that self-knowledge includes the belief of individual growth and possibility (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In an effort to increase knowledge about possible selves and move participants through the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2002), a participant-centered intervention focusing on the creation and implementation of an ethnodrama was developed. Ethnodrama uses research data to craft a performance script that retains the authenticity of findings while increasing audience understanding (Denzin, 2003; Mieniczakowski, 1995). For more information on the theoretical framework informing this study, see Eaton (2015).

Study aims focused on evaluating (a) the feasibility of the intervention to highlight late-life potential (Eaton, 2015) and (b) the effects of participation on nursing student attitudes toward older adults and adult attitudes to aging. This article presents results related to student and older adult participation in the development and implementation of an ethnodrama intervention, focusing on measured changes in nursing student attitudes toward older adults and older adult attitudes to aging.

Methods

This synchronous qualitative plus quantitative mixed method study (Morse & Niehaus, 2009) evaluated student attitudes toward older adults after participating in an ethnodrama intervention highlighting late-life potential through the creation and viewing of an ethnodrama on the topic of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Older adult attitudes to aging were also measured before and after the intervention. All activities of the study were conducted with approval from the institutional review board of the researcher's university.

Sample

Fifteen baccalaureate nursing students met inclusion criteria, which included enrollment in either traditional or accelerated baccalaureate nursing programs and showing interest in participating in this study. Rolling recruitment of student participants ended when 12 students were enrolled. The researcher visited nursing classes of second- and third-semester students and presented a short overview of the study. Students provided their name and e-mail if they were interested in more information. At this point, e-mails were sent to all interested students. Students were offered community-engaged learning hours, a letter of participation for their portfolio, and a copy of the final ethnodrama for participating. The researcher met with 15 students to review informed consent and gather signatures. All 15 consented, but 3 students dropped at the beginning of the intervention because of conflicts with required intervention meetings. A total of 12 students enrolled in the study ($n = 12$). Sample size was small in order to facilitate the creation of an ethnodrama. Longitudinal analysis views each observation

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