

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST  
FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK  
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**Emotional and temporal agency:**  
**A sociological study of old age and mental disorder accounts**  
**in graphic novels**

PhD Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ana Cosima Rughiniş

Doctoral Student: Andreea Elena Iancu

This thesis discusses representations of ageing and neurogenerative diseases associated to ageing in graphic novels, an extended form of comics, which is among most popular forms of media at the moment. Using thematic content analysis as a research method, this thesis discusses how emotion work, emotional labor, time work and time perception are represented in a selected corpus of graphic novels. The novels illustrate life stories of old people and patients suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia as well as their caregivers (family and friends) and caretakers (professional personnel), and the narratives focus on the relationships between the characters and what influences them.

The author investigates graphic media as a product of a social institution, that necessitates a better understanding in what messages are delivered to the audience and how these messages influence individuals in their daily lives. The study questions what media teaches individuals in real life about these conditions, how it constructs and deconstructs the social norms, what is acceptable and what individuals refuse to tolerate. In understanding the dynamics of graphic media in relation to social norms, one can understand how the process of interaction with older adults, mental care patients as well as caregivers and caretakers.

The theoretical background chapter adds context to the research by discussing age and gender as social institutions, and how they are influenced by cultural norms (March and Olsen, 1989). Gender is highly important for this thesis's subject as the characters represented in the discussed media are both patients as well as caregivers and caretakers. Various studies have shown that women are far more expected to be involved in the process of caregiving than men, as the attributes of a "good caregiver" are linked to the cultural attributes of femininity, such as patience, empathy, kindness and sensitivity, in comparison to attributes of masculinity, generally defined by power, determination and lower communication skills (Esplen, 2009). Another reason that shapes this social expectation is rooted in the cultural background where women are early thought to be caregivers and nurturers, while men are thought to be providers.

Further, the thesis discusses ageism and stereotypes linked to Alzheimer's and Dementia. An overview of other forms of media shows that elders and patients suffering from Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are less represented in television advertisements, magazine commercials and cinema products (Gantz et al., 1980). Literature has shown that men are more present in screen time compared to women (Lauren and Dozier, 2005), given the fact that media focuses more on attributes of external appearance, that tend to deteriorate in time so female actors

are less present on the stage compared to men. Female representation in television and magazines commercials is more oriented towards miracle makers products, influencing the public's perception on beauty standards and accepted and unaccepted attributes. Video games were among the investigated forms of media, and scholars results have shown that elders are less represented. When they were represented, none of the benefits of ageing such as wisdom or experience were present (Rughiniş et al., 2011). Alzheimer's and dementia representations in the media have shown a lack of knowledge regarding neurodegenerative conditions, as most depicted messages either label these conditions as disasters, or they linked them towards causes of natural ageing

Graphic novels have a distinctive role to play in cultivating empathy for the experiences of elderly people facing mental conditions or suffering from neurodegenerative diseases, such as dementia and Alzheimer's, and their caregivers and caretakers. They are traditionally known for addressing sensitive issues such as death, war, disease, or injustice. Understanding how elderly people and their caregivers and caretakers experience the passing of time, how are emotions involved in the process and what shapes their lived time, is important for a fuller grasp of how old life is lived.

Emotion work and emotional labor, two concepts developed by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979) were among the concepts of this work. The analysis focused on how emotional management is represented in selected novels, by looking into actions and routines of characters, and how they influence their emotions, as well as emotions of others. Emotional labor, as labor exercised in exchange for a wage was also a major focus point in this study, as professional caretakers were also present in the novels. Further the thesis discussed time work and time perception, two sociological concepts developed by Michael Flaherty (2002), and it implied analyzing how characters actively choose to manipulate time in order to modify the course of their activities. Time perception was referred to as how individuals' personal experience and subjectivity influence the perception of the objective, mathematical measured of time. Emotion work, emotional labor, time work and time perception were closely linked to the concept of social agency. Agency is often studied in contrast to structure, and it refers to individual's capacity to influence their living circumstances (Lopez and Scott, 2000)

As a research method this thesis is based on thematic content analysis, a method used to identify and analyze specific patterns of meaning in a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using thematic content analysis the author identified the following patterns to observe representations of

emotion work and emotional labour: 1) Situated rules of feeling: emotions emerge from tasks and situations related to caregiving, 2) Agency in emotion work – producing and managing feelings in an informal environment, 3) Agency in emotional labour – producing and managing feelings as a profession requirement, 4) Characters’ reactions to mediated feeling rules and norms, which contrast with the emotions they feel in their new roles, 5) Emotional agency in family systems and the emotion work of acceptance. In order to observe temporal agency of elders, mental care patients and their caregivers, Flaherty’s (2003) five dimensions of time work, *duration, frequency, sequence, timing, and allocation*, were linked to Hitlin and Elder’s (2007) four types of agency that take into consideration various time perspectives, 1) *existential agency*, 2) *pragmatic agency*, 3) *identity agency* and 4) *agency in the life course*. Starting from these initial codes, two additional patterns were created, activities related to the present and activities oriented to the future.

The selected graphic novels were among the few available that were discussing ageing and neurodegenerative diseases. The dataset consisted of the following graphic novels: *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass* (2013) by Dana Walrath, *Bird in a Cage* (2016) by Rebecca Roher. *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?: A Memoir* (2016) by Roz Chast, *Demented* (2004) by Jacky Fleming, *Special Exits* (2001) by Joyce Farmer, *Tangles* (2012) by Sarah Leavitt and *Wrinkles* (2016) by Paco Roca.

In the results section the author discussed over the previously mentioned patterns, by exemplifying using images to show why graphic medium is an accurate medium for observing such representations.

The conclusions chapter showed that agency is less predominant in the case of elders and mental care patients, as it suffers transformations where it is gradually transferred to caregivers and caretakers, especially regarding administrative tasks. The analyzed novels showed that the emotional dynamics between patients and caregivers is very intense, given the emotional involvement, and it was less intense in the case of patients and professional caretakers. Anger was observed as one of the most present emotional attributes, mainly determined by characters incapacity to align to emotional rules. As all the novels presented narratives that evolved around families, part of the attention was focused on the family as a unit, not on observations of separate individuals. Emotional agency is represented as a collective endeavor, a systematic process occurring through family interactions.

Existential and pragmatic agency was observed as being less represented in elders and mental care patients, and in the meantime, transferred to their caregivers. Identity agency, on the other hand, was observed in these characters. Agency in life course, linked to allocation, took into consideration the perspective of death for all types of characters, for both elders and patients, as well as their caregivers.

Regarding gender representativity and agency, data showed that women characters express agency in the form of anger more than men when they are in the roles of caregivers, especially when there are personal stakes in relation to the patients. While ageing or Alzheimer's and other forms of mental care conditions do not affect women and men different from a medical point of view, they affect them differently from a social point of view give the social expectations linked to their roles. The analyzed graphic novels showed not only that old age is stigmatized but ageing caregiving is being represented from a stereotypical point of view, mostly distributed in the roles of female caregiving, indicating that women are more expected from the rules of society to take care of their loved ones on providing hands-on caring, while men are expected to offer emotional support only.

The medium of graphic novels proved to be a, once more, a very efficient form of media in addressing delicate issues and representing relevant details through specific images and carefully chosen words. The sequence of images as well as the cartooned characters allow the consumer of the media to construct her or his own add-ons to the story and give it a personal perspective. The short sentences with strong words allow the consumer to receive a frontal, direct message and dive into its meaning using the consumer's own system of values.

As a final recommendation, media should probably focus more on the positive aspects of the individuals' daily life but also on re-establishing gender caregiving roles, as a natural adapting to society changes and gender equality. Also, graphic media could serve as an emphatic lens towards ageing and all that the process implies and generate efforts that should determine understanding between generations but also empower the characters for their life experience, positive outcomes and determine the generating of efforts meant. Such efforts would lead to constructive ways of collaborating between professional caregivers, authorities, old people, people who suffer from ageing related mental diseases, as well as their families and friends, to develop mechanisms that help vulnerable groups of people go through this delicate process in a decent, loving and as healthy as possible manner.

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