



## Temporal agency: Patterns, accounts and representations of old age and mental illness in graphic novels

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### Abstract

*This research investigates how time work and agency are represented in graphic media that discusses mental illness associated with ageing. It focuses on how elders and their caregivers perform time work, what are their specific actions in manipulating their time experience and for what purpose, and how agency and time work are connected. This study is based only on representation of time work and agency in the corpus of selected media. The research method for this study is thematic content analysis of a corpus consisting of contemporary graphic novels. By crossing Michael Flaherty's five dimensions of time work with Hitlin and Elder's four types of agency, two separate patterns were created, one that observes daily activities and one that observes activities that are planned for the future. The selected graphic media, published between 2006 and 2016, discusses ageing and diseases associated with ageing, focusing on the social implications that derive from the process, that are reflected upon individuals and their close ones. Results showed that both types of characters, patients and caregivers, perform time work in order to postpone activities and life events, and that time work influences how characters lose agency and ultimately, regain it in a different form.*

### Keywords

Graphic media; Caregiving; Alzheimer's; Mental illness; Dementia; Ageing; Older adults; Seniors; Time work; Time perception; Agency;

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## Introduction

The genre of graphic media delivers the emotional perspective of mental illness more helpful than text alone. Mental illness is discussed in a variety of contemporary graphic novels, as many graphic artists tackle issues like obsessive-compulsive disorder (“Turtles All the Way Down” by John Green, “The Bad Doctor” by Ian Williams, “Everything Is an Emergency: An OCD Story in Words & Pictures” by Jason Adam Katzenstein), anxiety (“Just Peachy” by Holly Chisholm, “Super Chill: A Year of Living Anxiously” by Adam Ellis, “The Fire Never Goes Out” by Noelle Stevenson) or depression (“Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, & Me” by Ellen Forney, “Look Straight Ahead” by Elaine M. Will, “Kinds of Blue: An Anthology of Comics about Depression” by Karen Beilharz etc.). According to Alverson (2018), Stossell (2019), Kenyanah (2021) and other writers, there is a discussion about the representation of mental illness among educators, who use graphic novels to both encourage students to better understand complicated ideas, as well as help them relate to the characters and reduce the stigma on mental illness. However, these discussions mainly tackle conditions that can be related to younger readers, and they leave an unexplored territory regarding the discussion of mental care associated with ageing, which can also contribute to reducing the stigma, stereotyping and social inclusion. There is not much written about representations of old age and mental care conditions associated with ageing, but the [graphicmedicine.org](http://graphicmedicine.org) platform is a very good resource for mental illness representations in graphic novels, including mental illness associated with old age. I started this research by wanting to know more about better understanding the connection between agency and time in representations of old age and mental illness associated to ageing and how this understanding can contribute to stigma reduction and social inclusion.

Agency refers to the individual expression of will and is discussed in the structuration theory elaborated by Anthony Giddens, where the author focuses on the interdependence between agency and structure. Time work refers to the conscious attempts that individuals perform in order to influence the perception of time and this paper is focused on Michael Flaherty’s work on the concept. One main area of interest is how agency influences time work for elders and people who suffer from mental illness associated to ageing, and how diminishing of agency for these characters is represented. Further, the paper focuses on how time passing is perceived for both elders and patients, as well as for their caregivers.

## Serious graphic novel as an object of scientific study

### *Graphic media as social institution*

Graphic novels are an extended and more in-depth form of comics, a “term used to describe a format that uses a combination of words and sequential art to convey a narrative” (Fletcher-Spear et al., 2015). The characteristics of the medium are explained in Scot McCloud’s work, “Understanding Comics” (1993), where the author states that it is easier to focus on a specific detail in comics because comics are multimodal or

intersectional, they use more than just one way to tell a story. Therefore, the message is delivered by text and reinforced by image, which helps improve the literacy skills of readers in understanding the meaning of the narrative. McCloud also states that by drawing more simplified images of individuals, by reducing the details, the characters look less like a specific individual, and more like a generic character that everyone can relate to, regardless of their particularities. A good example of this statement is the usage of emoticons that people use in their daily conversation to express their feelings and views upon certain topics. Graphic novels and comics offer representations of people, objects, places, ideas or actions. To have a mutual understanding on what is being represented, authors use icons that “look like” the real thing, but these representations are not, in fact, the real experience. The interpretation of these representations depends on the reader and his reaction to the content. The consumer of the media naturally sees a representation and constructs his personal version of reality on the subject (McCloud, 1993). The importance of studying representations in graphic novels derives from the above-mentioned issues, because depending on how characters, issues and stories are represented, they can shape mentalities and determine social norms.

Graphic novels have a tradition in addressing delicate issues such as social disorder, war, disease and death. Previously, graphic novels that discuss OCD, anxiety and depression were mentioned. Graphic media discussing war and political violence are also gaining popularity. A few examples are “Maus” by Art Spiegelman (winner of Pulitzer Prize Special Citations and Awards in 1992), “Freedom Hospital” by Hamid Sulaiman, “Safe Area Gorazde” by Joe Sacco “Persepolis” by Marjane Satrapi and “The Arab of the Future” by Riad Sattouf.

According to the International Association of Professional Writers & Editors (2009), teachers and educators are starting to use graphic media as teaching material. Arnold (2017) is one of the scholars who uses graphic novels in the classroom for the following benefits: the simplified text is more accurate for emergent readers, visual support helps understanding complex stories, visual graphics improve memorization, consuming graphic media allows students to engage in multiple learning modalities (visual and written), storyboarding helps to organize the content of the plot, visual representations help to decipher meaning, and the experience overall contributes to the appreciation and understanding of artistic imagery.

While teachers and coaches focus on the educational impact that graphic novels have upon students, from a sociological point of view it is useful to observe how graphic novels contribute to individuals’ interaction with the message resulting in shaping and reshaping social institutions. The sociological interest in graphic communication is not a new topic of discussion. In 1944, Zorbaugh stated that graphic media acts as a social force, given the fact that language and representation of characters can be exploited for purposes beyond entertainment. The author also mentioned that graphic media has a potential “in the ‘outgrowth of the social unconscious’ to illuminate the link between individuals’ problems and the social world” (Zorbaugh, 1944). Further on, comics started to be perceived as legitimate scientific objects among scholars, as journals specialized in comics started to appear. A few examples are the following: *Inks*, founded in 1994 by Ohio

State University Press, *The International Journal of Comic Art*, founded in 1999, *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Comics Studies*, founded in 2004, *The Journal of Sequential Art in Narrative Education*, *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *The Journal Studies in Comics*, founded in 2010, *The Comic Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, founded in 2013 (Barberis & Grüning, 2021).

Since 2010 (twenty years after *Maus* won the Pulitzer Prize), there has been a surge in scientific interest in comics, coinciding with the launch of book series and the expansion of academic research networks. Recent breakthroughs in comics-related academic works highlight three primary domains where comics can be used as a viable study tool: media studies, literary studies, and other fields (gender studies, postcolonial studies, etc.). As a result, it appears that the interdisciplinarity of comics is owed more to their place within existing interdisciplinary areas than to the involvement and exchanges of researchers from diverse disciplines. Several themes examined in comics, on the other hand, are of sociological interest. Sociological theories are increasingly being utilized to evaluate comics issues and explain their evolution, particularly their production, dissemination, and reception in varied social situations (Barberis & Grüning, 2021).

We view graphic media as a product of a social organization because of its ability to reflect cultural norms and to resonate within specific social contexts (Dobbins, 2016). This necessitates a deeper understanding of what messages are conveyed to the viewer and how these messages affect individuals in their everyday lives. Given the medium's considerable influence, this research focuses on how elders and people suffering from different types of mental illness are depicted in graphic media, in order to observe how it builds and deconstructs social expectations.

### ***Graphic media and ageing stigma***

Old age deals with a strong wave of stigma. Stigma was first introduced by Emile Durkheim in 1895, in the context of the deviance theory, where he stated that every society has the authority to judge and punish those who defy societal standards by classifying their actions as criminal (or deviant) and treating them accordingly. Stigma is also defined as a phenomenon in which an individual with a severely discredited attribute is rejected as a result of that attribute (Goffman, 1963), or stereotyping or attaching negative judgment to a person's or a group's qualities or behaviors perceived as distinct from or inferior to society norms (Dudley, 2000).

There can be no stigma without a society. There must be a stigmatizer and someone who is stigmatized for stigma to exist. As a result, this is a social and dynamic connection. There are three varieties of stigma, according to Goffman: (1) stigma related with mental illness; (2) stigma linked with physical deformity; and (3) stigma associated with affinity with a specific race, ethnicity, religion, ideology, or other groups. In the case of mental care patients, the discussion is not about patients suffering from a mental condition but about how their individuals are perceived by those who do not suffer from a mental condition.

Ageism, or the stigma attached to advanced aged individuals, can be observed in various environments, including healthcare facilities or the workplace, where individuals

must obey the mandatory retirement age law. Ageism is built on people's qualities that are based on their physical appearance, such as hair and facial structure, as well as verbal and nonverbal aspects of their interactions. (Bieman-Copland & Ryan, 2001). Richeson and Shelton (2006) state that in general people tend to attach negative attributes to older persons, in comparison to younger individuals, and they also tend to generalize these attributes by looking at advanced aged people as part of a homogenous group, not separate individuals. Some of these negative traits define elders as "senior citizens" who are physically and psychologically challenged, weak, lonely, and old-fashioned (Brewer et al., 1981). Stigma can also be experienced on a positive note, by receiving unsolicited help from other individuals (Chasteen, 2015). In either of the situations, it implies a type of behavior expressed towards an individual that has nothing to do with his personal features, but with the features associated with age to a medical condition.

The media adds more power to this wave of stigma. In his work, "The Obsolete Self: Philosophical Dimensions of Aging", Esposito (1987) states that the United States culture is actively supporting a multimillion industry by indirectly pressing elders to consume medication and beauty products to remain young, stressing the benefits of these products in opposition to the negative effects of natural ageing. Old age is represented in the media not as a natural life process that should be embraced, but as a process which cannot be avoided but should be postponed as much as possible (Richeson & Shelton, 2006).

Stigma is strongly associated with mental disorders, as it inhibits people from acknowledging, much less admitting to others, that they suffer from such conditions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). The literature also discusses the impact that stigma has over patients who suffer from mental disorders or neurodegenerative disorders (Hinshaw & Stier, 2008). In the case of individuals suffering from dementia, stigma is widely spread, despite the efforts in stigma advocacy.

People suffering from Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia experience a gradual weakening of mental abilities. Dementia affects people's memory, reasoning speed, and behavior, as well as their ability to carry out daily tasks. Since these characteristics are often found in the stereotypes attached to elders, two out of three people consider Alzheimer's a stage of ageing, not a neurodegenerative disorder. This is one of the results of the 2019 "World Alzheimer's Report" (Alzheimer's Disease International, 2019. World Alzheimer Report 2019: Attitudes to dementia. London: Alzheimer's Disease International.), based on the responses of 70,000 people from 155 countries. The paper demonstrated a profound lack in understanding ageing, mental disorders, neurodegenerative diseases and the differences between them. Respondents were people with dementia, caretakers, healthcare professionals, and other interested persons. 62% of caretakers considered that Alzheimer's is a natural ageing process. 20% of the respondents stated that dementia is a result of "bad luck", almost 10% to destiny and 2% to spells.

Stigma is influenced by a variety of factors such as education, cultural context or level of religiosity. The different perceptions of stigma among individuals could be linked to a lack of knowledge towards the subject, according to the 2019 "World Alzheimer's Report".

Reducing stigma upon individuals who suffer from dementia is important in the context of the wide spreading of this condition. According to the same report, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive disorders are the world's fifth leading cause of death. The number of individuals living with dementia will triple by 2050, going from more than 50 million in the present to 152 million in a period of thirty years. According to the previously mentioned research, every three seconds a person gets dementia but because of the stigma and lack of knowledge, most people will not be diagnosed and treated. Stigma prevents individuals from asking for help and improving their quality of life. When connected to old age, it determines people to focus on getting used to old age rather than finding treatment for Alzheimer's Disease or dementia.

Stigma not only affects patients but also their families, through a phenomenon called stigmatization by association (Weiss *et al.*, 2006). Shame, anxiety, hostility, low self-esteem, apathy, and a lack of support can all affect the family of the sick and other caregivers. In the case of a study conducted on patients suffering from schizophrenia, the results showed that the stigma upon their caregivers resulted in the patient's exclusion and decrease in quality of life. Also, stigma appointed to medical professionals resulted in a reluctance in properly diagnosing the sick and therefore, a delay in providing a proper treatment (Rewerska-Juśko & Rejdak, 2020).

## **Time, old age and mental illness**

### ***Time perception for older adults and Alzheimer's disease patients***

A study in 2005, conducted by psychologists Marc Wittmann and Sandra Lenhoff, concluded that time seems to pass at a higher pace for advanced age individuals (Robison, 2016). The survey was based on the responses of 499 people, ranging from 14 to 94 years, who were surveyed about how quickly they perceived time was passing them by. Their responses ranged from "extremely slowly" to "very fast." The respondents' perception of time did not appear to increase with age for shorter periods of time – a week, a month, or even a year. However, during longer periods of time, such as a decade, a trend emerged: elderly persons saw time to be going faster.

In his 1890 publication, "Principles of Psychology", psychologist William James claimed that as we get older, time seems to speed quickly since maturity is marked by fewer memorable occurrences (Gaines Lewis, 2013). With ageing, time is perceived as being limited, therefore short-term goals like social connectedness, social support, and emotional regulation become more important for individuals (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999).

Time in the context of old age should also be observed by taking into consideration the activities that occupy elders' time. Grapsa and Posel (2016) state that, with the increased life expectancy, retirement is no longer viewed as a period of rest in the individual's life course, and scholars have increased their interest in understanding how old people spend their time. Under the concept of active ageing, these activities include paid employment, physical activity and leisure activities, social interaction, volunteering, actively participating in community life, and household activities. The more elders spend

their time by being active, the more likely they will have a higher satisfaction of life (Gauthier & Smeeding, 2003). By connecting these findings to James' previously mentioned theory, we can conclude that if elders experience more new things and create more new memories, they experience a slower passing of time, thus they perform time work.

Patients with Alzheimer's disease show considerable deviations from accurate clock time due to significant changes in time interval judgment (Nichelli *et al.*, 1993). According to El Haj *et al.*, (2013) they show a pattern of deficits that can be explained by a greater engagement of the clock, memory, and how decisional systems work for them. Time perception must be understood from both a prospective and retrospective view. In the perspective view, people are asked in advance to estimate the duration of an activity, while in the retrospective view, they are asked to estimate the duration of an activity after the activity happened. The first is based on time mechanisms while the second focuses on cognitive mechanisms that are not specifically linked to the time. Therefore, in retrospective view, participants make use of their memory. Using memory to recall events and approximate their duration gives a subjective perspective on the process and allows individuals to "time travel", in other words, to project themselves in an event that happened in the past, in order to remember specific details.

El Haj *et al.* (2013) state that most research on time perception in the process of ageing focuses on perspective measurements of time, while less research is available on retrospective measurements. In the case of patients suffering from Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, even fewer studies are available. Rueda *et al.* (2009) made a comparison between time perception for older adults and patients suffering from Alzheimer's, by interrogating 17 people from each of these two categories on their time length perception of four different intervals, 10 seconds, 25 seconds, 45 seconds and 60 seconds. During each interval, they were asked to read sequences of numbers from a screen, followed by the question "How long did this activity last?". The results showed that while there was no statistically significant difference in mean verbal time estimations between the Alzheimer's patients' group and the older adults group, there were variations in absolute inaccuracy. The verbal estimates of the Alzheimer's patients differed from genuine clock time more significantly than those of older adults, with some significantly underestimating time and others significantly overestimating time, so that the mean estimate nearly resembled true clock time. Participants with Alzheimer's disease were also found to be more inconsistent when assessing interval durations of equal lengths. This shows that patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease have difficulties in remembering events, they rely on fewer memories and the gaps are filled by their subjective perspective, which allows them to travel in time. Because, as Tulving's (2002) quote states "no sense of subjective time, no mental time travel".

Time measurements have long ago been established, they are rooted in religion from the oldest times and are almost impossible to change today, as it would be hard to get the world to function by a five or a ten-day week. Temporal socialization is a process we all undergo as children, regardless of our culture and social norms, the type of family we come from, or the preferences we have. Although there are still societies in the world

that measure time by the position of the sun, as ancient people used to (Flaherty, 2011) the standardized measurements of temporal intervals have helped humanity organize in a precise way, which leaves no room for interpretation or manipulation. The intersubjective nature of time was discussed by philosopher Alfred Schütz (Muzzetto, 2006), who stated that standard time is in fact an intersection between individual duration, and in his view, this is what makes it irreversible. He discusses the subjectivity of time as a social concept, as there is no human experience that is not in some regard social. Schütz also states that time enters in the construction of meaning, as meaning is a function of lived-through time and as meaning changes, it gains a new and irreversible perspective for each moment. There is no such thing as *my time* or *your time*, but *our time*, that passes for us simultaneously. According to Schütz, common time is a construction of the social world, and as objective and scientific the standards measurements of time are, time must be understood considering the relation between each subjective individual experience.

We look at time from both an objective and subjective perspective. The objective perspective consists of the fact that, technically, we all understand time in the same way. By using time references, a group of people can all meet on a certain day or a certain hour. This allows us to group and undergo specific activities in an organized, synchronized way. There is no negotiation when we set the duration of half an hour: it has long ago been established that half an hour means 30 minutes. Also, a medical appointment that is scheduled at 10 sharp implies that the patient and the doctor should be both present at the specified place at the exact time, because any violation of this agreement would translate into further chaos in their agenda. The subjectivity of time consists of duration perception and other qualities of lived time. Some days feel like minutes while some seconds feel like hours. Time is a flexible reference in social terms, and the distortion in our perceptions is caused by a multitude of factors that eventually do not change the actual measurement and the mechanics of time but make us feel that time goes faster or slower.

Flaherty observes that there are several factors that may shape one's perception of time and lived duration. Lived duration is a non-agentic but rather structural aspect which takes into consideration the fact that one's impression on how time passes is influenced by external, social factors, and does not come from within the individual, thus must be understood as part of a complex system of actions, institutions, experiences and norms (Flaherty, 2018).

Flaherty shows that time is felt different from one individual to another under six general conditions (Flaherty, 2018), as follows: 1) suffering from an intense experience of emotions, 2) being in the presence of danger and violence, 3) feeling boredom, 4) suffering from states of consciousness that are altered, 5) performing meditation or being concentrated, 6) being in the presence of shock and novelty. In Flaherty's perspective, one of them only is an enough cause for time distortion in one's perception.



### Time work

On conceptualizing temporal agency, Flaherty (2020) states that we most look at time as not something that happens to us, but something that we make happen. This involves expression of agency while taking time into consideration, so that individuals are the designers of how they experience time. As Flaherty states, the concept of time refers to how people choose to manipulate and alter their experience, this modifying the course of their activities.

In better understanding the mechanisms of time management, Flaherty has determined five dimensions of time work, also called as “doing time”, that he has developed through his work, *Time Work: Customizing Temporal Experience* (2003), as follows: 1) duration, 2) frequency, 3) sequence, 4) timing, and 5) allocation.

*Duration* manipulation time work refers to the effort individuals consider to influence how they experience the duration of time, other than the objective length of the time interval, measured by mechanisms such as clocks or calendars. One such example that Flaherty provides is the temporal experience of a couple of lovers who spend their time together, knowing that their time is limited and soon they will be separated. So, to influence the duration of time, they make no reference of the future activities, knowing that they are separated in the future, but only refer to the present and the past.

*Frequency* manipulation time work refers to how often a specific activity should take place, and it usually takes other constraints into consideration. An example provided in Flaherty’s work is the experience of a young man who frequently goes out with his work friends and manipulates the prevention of these encounters based on other workloads they have. Should the load be light, they would go out more frequently. Should there be critical activities and pressing deadlines, they would postpone their hangouts and thus meet less outside the working hours.

*Sequence* manipulation refers to how we influence sequential activities that precede each other and have a consecutive order. Individuals can choose whether to respect and follow that specific order or they can change it. As an example, when starting a new day, while prepping up, individuals follow a certain morning routine since they wake up until they leave for work, which usually involves showering, hair blow-drying, shaving or applying make-up, getting dressed, having breakfast. While some individuals are extremely strict to their morning daily routine, others are more flexibly open to changing the order of the activities in the sequence, or even skipping a step. Apart from each individual’s personality, the decision in manipulating the sequence of these events also takes into consideration other constraints such as other activities that might interfere with the sequence or the time frame assigned for the sequence.

*Timing* manipulation refers to how individuals choose to undertake specific actions at a specific time, or when the timing is in their favor, when the time is right for that specific activity. The rules that determine when the time is right are also established by biological, social, cultural, or personal norms. For instance, when we see a higher frequency of a certain event happening in a specific period, we can understand that that period is a good time for the specific activity. In Flaherty’s work, we have various examples that endorse

the idea: most weddings take place during the summer months, even if there are no constraints for the other months of the year. However, individuals consider these months to be a better timing for the event, for various cultural reasons. Another example looks at the massive increase of birthrate in China in the year of 2007, the Year of the Pig in the Chinese Calendar, in opposition to a major dropdown of the birth rate in the report of the average rate in the year of 2003, the Year of the Sheep. The explanation for these events is that in Chinese culture it is believed that children who are born in the Year of the Pig will be healthy and prosperous, while children who are born in the Year of The Sheep will have an unhappy life. Therefore, parents choose the right timing for having a child in accordance with their cultural beliefs.

Finally, *Allocation* manipulation refers to the activity individuals do to influence how they make time for certain events, and how they shape the length of the time they devote to the specific event. People chose to allow more or less time for specific activities based on how relevant those activities are to them. Flaherty gives an example of young residents who try to cut off a conversation with patients and family when discussing a medical issue of the patient because most of the talk by the family is irrelevant to the context. So, they work to reduce the time. On the opposite view, when interested in self-developing, individuals will allow more time to acquire new skills and learn new things.

### **Agency**

According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), the dispute over whether instrumental rationality or moral and norm-based behavior is the truest manifestation of human freedom can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. The concept of agency arose, affirming human beings' ability to influence the conditions in which they live. Following John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham, this conviction sustained a long line of social thinkers, embedding agency in an individualist and calculative definition of action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

The concept of agency referring to people's capacity to act on their own and make individual decisions draws from the theory of social structure developed by Emile Durkheim. Structure may refer to both material, also known as economic aspects, as well as cultural aspects, taking into account norms, traditions, ideologies. Durkheim (1893) stated that there are established patterns of acting, thinking, and feeling that are common across a community and operate as external restraints on its members. Agency is discussed from an opposite view with structure referring to the individual capacity to act despite those norms.

Agency is also studied in relation to deviance, the act of going against the norms and rules of a society, an act that society disregards because it offends the predetermined social order. Since the society rules determine what is acceptable within the society, the actions that go against those rules represent the unaccepted and not allowed, and agency is the feature that makes individuals act in a deviant way, and go on a different path in order to obtain what they want. Since a deviant behavior is not necessarily negative, as Heckert (2002) states, by referring to the fact that even if a rule was violated, the behavior

itself can be positive, then agency should not be understood either from a positive or negative point of view.

Stones (2015) views agency as the individuals' capacity to act and get things done given the social constraints and opportunities. He sees the existence of agency not despite structure, but within it, and considers that modern sociology does not focus on the opposition of these concepts, but how they are connected. This new approach raises the question to what extent is agency influenced by social structure and to what extent is agency an act of independent will.

Deriving from Durkheim's work, Lopez and Scott (2000) proposed two major approaches of conceiving structure. The *rational* notion of structure refers to how people are linked together into social groups and social networks and are usually grouped into specialized social relations sectors such as family ties, religion, the economy, and the state, among others. The *institutional* is the second type of structure, and it refers to the beliefs, values, symbols, ideas, and expectations that make up a society's common knowledge and allow members to communicate and engage meaningfully. Both approaches to the structure are used to identify a pattern. The concept of a pattern is frequently incorporated into the definition of structure, as elaborated by Parsons (1945): "a system of patterned relationships of actors in their capacity as playing roles relative to one another". Agents operating in line with normative expectations, as in the institutional view of structure, or in accordance with the needs of mutual interdependence, as in the relational view of structure, can form such patterns.

Hitlin and Elder (2007) state that, even though agency is linked to individuals' capacity to act differently from the norm within the group, in recent discussion over the nature of agency, the self is scarcely mentioned. To better link agency to the self, Hitlin and Elder suggest that taking into account Mead's incorporation of time is mandatory.

According to Mead, the self exists specifically in the ever-changing present, a time in which the person understands events and symbols, and acts in accordance to her or his history and projections over the future. The present moment is influenced by both anticipation as well as memory, a moment that passes quickly as the actor plans and reacts to current events. Mead considers that one cannot remove the actor from the temporal circumstances. As previously mentioned, since humans are capable of performing time work, they manifest agency by shaping their personal experience of time. As a result, agency happens at the level of the individual's control over her or his own self-experience, which is something people discover around the age of three or four, according to Barresi (2001). Southerton (2013) adds that while time is experienced individually, the social world influences agency regarding time work, as individuals must take into consideration various constraints and social norms that they must respect as part of various communities (Southerton, 2013).

Following Mead's and Flaherty's work on agency on time and time work context, Hitlin and Elder have identified four types of agency, as follows: 1) existential agency, 2) pragmatic agency, 3) identity agency & 4) agency in the life course.

*Existential agency* refers to the capacity of self-directed action, that all individuals have at a certain level. The authors state that writers such as Sartre, Hegel and Goffman

discuss the fact that even individuals who have less power such as slaves or patients suffering from mental health conditions, have the existential capacity to act, even if they face serious consequences and are limited by various constraints, ranging from their level of freedom. The focus on existential agency is not on the capacity of people to act on their own, but on the social limitations of the act itself, perceived by the individual. Scholars Bandura (1997) and Gecas (2003) consider that the perception of the individual upon his act of free will, also defined as self-efficacy, is the core of human agency, because self-efficacy takes into consideration self-reflective understandings of people's skills and abilities within various fields, and once these ideas are developed, they control ambitions, behavioral choices and emotions.

*Pragmatic agency* refers to the fact that individuals react according to the social world, they react to stimuli, not independently, by ignoring the social environment they are in. As time is part of the social environment, individuals react most strongly based on the present moment, by taking into consideration what they see and feel and know in the present moment. According to Hitlin and Elder, pragmatic agency is expressed where routines and patterns fail. Given the fact that people tend to follow pre-established routes and form habits, when these patterns change, they act differently and express a form of agency where they are aware of the change. However, people do not react randomly in these situations, but they are guided by intuition, personal beliefs and values.

*Identity agency* occurs when people act to achieve a desired role. Based on what individuals try to obtain in terms of identity roles, they are accountable to both themselves as well as to others. We make commitments based on the identity roles we want to obtain, so we do not act randomly, but we plan and control our actions in accordance with what we want to acquire in terms of identity. We exert agency over behavior so that we become who we want to be. Based on the feedback we receive from the external world, we modify our agentic choices.

According to Owens and Goodney (2000), identity agency is linked to the individual's sense of shame. If our choices fail to comply with what we perceive as external expectations, we might express shame or disapproval caused by the gap between who we want to be and how other people see us. Hitlin and Elder state that failing to reach the desired identity goals and therefore failing to meet the identity commitments we make to ourselves and others leads to a state of shame that, ultimately threatens the sense of self. In the authors' view, the more serious the concern of failing to live up to one's identity, the more one feels threatened.

*Agency in the Life Course* refers to actions that one manifests to influence her or his life trajectory. Unlike pragmatic and identity agency, which are more linked to present actions, agency in the life course is exercised taking into account long term implications. Agency in the life course has two characteristics. The first implies that agency takes place with long term effects, and the second one refers to the individuals' self-reflective conviction in one's ability to attain life objectives. While the first is an objective statement that links action to long term effects, the second characteristic has a subjective component that takes into account whether individuals believe they have self-control over how they influence the accomplishment of their objectives. Given the fact that objectives are linked

to a time limit, while expressing agency in the life course; individuals keep in mind their self-capacity of performing certain actions in a given time, which is why the more agency individuals express, it is more probable to perform better when encountering problems and obstacles (Bandura, 1982). By performing agency in the life course, people have a better capacity of making lifelong decisions, which differentiates from their capacity of reaching their objectives. The first is about decision making, while the second is about effective implementation. Individual skills to orient oneself toward long-term results across social domains are referred to as life course agency.

While "agency" is an abstract idea, it is realized through contextual action. In order to keep their place within groups and organizations, actors must solve issues and enact or establish identities and connections.

While studying agency and its temporal variations in the Finnish adult foster care system, Leinonen (2020) draws attention to one aspect regarding time and time work when working with elders in an institutionalized environment. Unlike working in a typical service providing organization, facilities that deal with caring for the elders or mental health patients are subject to a different type of time flow, that is not set by the providers of the service, but by the clients. Taking this into consideration, we must underline that the temporal experience of caregivers is partially determined by the beneficiaries of the facility, even if they are not actually aware of the fact that they do this. Leinonen also draws attention to the fact that when caring for the elders or individuals that suffer from mental conditions, all decisions regarding the time of the patients are made by the caretakers, so patients express less agency. Further investigation on how agency is expressed and how time work is being represented when dealing with elderly care should take into consideration both patients and their caregivers, as their interaction given one's dependence towards the other highly influences the previously mentioned aspects.

## Methodology

For this research I am using thematic content analysis as a research method, and I take into account a corpus of graphic novels that deal with old age and mental health conditions that are linked to old age, such as Alzheimer's and dementia.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006) thematic analysis (TA) is a method used to both identify as well as analyze specific patterns of meaning in a set of data. Thematic analysis investigates the main themes that are present in the dataset which helps describe the phenomenon to study (Daly et al., 1997).

I have used a guideline created by Braun and Clarke, that determines the phases of thematic analysis, as follows:

1. Getting to know the data
2. Creating initial codes
3. Recognizing themes
4. Going through the previously established trends again
5. Explaining the themes; and
6. Presenting the findings in a final study.

For this research I am looking at how temporal agency of elders, mental care patients and their caregivers is represented in the previously presented graphic novels, making use of Flaherty's five dimensions of time work that were previously detailed, *duration, frequency, sequence, timing, and allocation*, as well as of Hitlin and Elder's four types of agency that take into consideration various time perspectives, *existential agency, pragmatic agency, identity agency and agency in the life course*. These are my initial codes for this research.

Further, I constructed themes to analyze in my dataset how time work is being represented in the graphic media, by creating two different patterns I further investigated.

The first pattern investigates how time work is being presented regarding the daily activities of elders, patients as well as caregivers, while connecting duration, frequency, sequence and timing to *existential agency, pragmatic agency, identity agency* and the second pattern investigates activities that are oriented towards the future, where I connected allocation to *agency in the life course*.

**Table 1. Connection between time work dimensions and types of agency**

Identified patterns	Activities related to daily performances of elders, patients as well as caregivers				Activities that are oriented towards the future
	Duration	Frequency	Sequence	Timing	Allocation
<b>Flaherty's five dimensions of time work / Elder's four types of agency</b>					
<i>Existential Agency</i>	x	x	x	x	
<i>Pragmatic Agency</i>	x	x	x	x	
<i>Identity Agency</i>	x	x	x	x	
<i>Agency in the life course</i>					x

Therefore, my two patterns will investigate two types of agency: present oriented agency and future oriented agency. I will let these patterns guide my research as I investigate how agency is transferred and regained from elders, mental care patients and their caregivers, either medical personnel, or family and friends.

## Dataset

My dataset consists of seven graphic novels that put the spotlight on characters who are either older adults or seniors who suffer from mental conditions, neurodegenerative disorders or dementia. All selected novels follow the stories of these characters who will be referred to as patients, as well as the dynamics of the relationship that they have with their caretakers, either professional or family and friends.

"Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass" by Dana Walrath tells the story of a young woman whose mother named Alice suffers from Alzheimer's – hence the twist of words between her mother's name and the name of the neurodegenerative disorder. This graphic memoir is a non-traditional graphic novel as it does not follow the classical sequential model, but the author makes use of shredded pieces of paper taken from Lewis Carol's novel "Alice in Wonderland" to form visual images that suggest the

gradual loss of identity elements, as Alice becomes less and less Alice. The plot is focused on the dialogue between Alice and her daughter Dana.

“Bird in a Cage” by Rebecca Roher is also a memoir, presented from the perspective of the writer, about her grandmother’s dementia, that occurs after a car accident. The author gives references to her grandmother and underlines the changes in the life of the entire family after the accident happened and when her grandmother started performing activities she was not aware of.

“Can’t We Talk about Something More Pleasant? A Memoir” by Roz Chast tells the story of the author’s parents and their transition towards ageing. Roz Chast illustrates in a colour-friendly graphic method the process of ageing that culminates with the death of both her parents, and how it is experienced by the three of them. We learn from the beginning that the title is inspired by her parents’ restraint of discussing delicate issues such as death, but it can also be understood as a metaphor for the fact that generally, ageing is not a very pleasant topic of discussion.

“Demented” by Jacky Fleming is a fictional short-length graphic novel that discusses the perks of getting old, the main changes experienced by an individual, stressing the negative effects of ageing in women, and how this affects their relationships with other people. The term used for the title does not refer to being demented as a mental care problem, the character does not suffer from dementia, but can be seen as a metaphor for losing one’s mind over the inevitable passing of years.

“Special Exits” by Joice Farmer is a fictional graphic novel that shows the portrait of a family emerging in daily activities to keep their emotional equilibrium while caring for the elder. The author stresses her parents’ incapacity or lack of will when it comes to taking important or difficult decisions regarding their daily life, which determines their daughter to gradually take on these responsibilities with full dedication, while she is trying to balance the new activities with her personal life.

“Tangles” by Sarah Leavitt is a graphic memoir where the writer takes account of the life and death of an Alzheimer’s patient, in the person of the author’s mother. She uses the medium of comics to stress small but important details, especially when discussing about her mother’s memory, and her transformation from a strong individual to a fragile person. The name “tangles” suggest the complications of a twisted mind.

“Wrinkles” by Paco Roca is a fictional graphic novel that reveals in a fascinating technique the story of Ernest, a retired bank manager who suffers from Alzheimer’s. The action takes place in a mental care facility, which differentiates it from the previously presented novels. Ernest’s son and daughter-in-law can no longer take proper care of him, so they take him to a specialized facility, but they do not inform him of the diagnosis, of which he finds out by accident in the facility. Being almost entirely populated by elders, “Wrinkles” presents the dynamics between patients of the facility, and between them and their caregivers.

In my research, I have not found a large variety of graphic novels to serve as data for my work, since the field of graphic media that focuses on elders and patients who suffer from mental illnesses related to ageing is still unexplored. At the moment of the writing of this thesis, the graphic media audience seemed to be more interested in consuming graphic

novels that discuss mental conditions such as depression, anxiety and stress, associated with a rapid pace of life rhythm of adults and young adults. Also, I could find a significant number of graphic novels that discuss mental illnesses that are allocated to the psychiatric field such as schizophrenia, but the characters were not elders, so I have not included these in my work. To offer a more actual context, my dataset contains only contemporary graphic novels that tackle ageing, ageism and elder mental care illness, that offer the perspective of a possible reality. I have, thus, excluded a small number of novels who were written in a fantasy perspective (involving magic and time travel, such as “Time and Vine” by Tom Zahler), and I focused only on autobiographies and realistic novels, as my intention was to explore the representation of elders in a world of possible things.

The graphic media I have chosen describes life stories that take place in large and very dynamic cities in various countries and continents, such as Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, Vermont, New York and Los Angeles in the United States, London in the United Kingdom and Valencia in Spain. They are all contemporary novels, written between 2006 and 2016. What they have in common, apart from temporal similarity, is the representation of ageing or disease assimilated to ageing focusing on how these processes affect both patients and caregivers, in a large city environment.

## Results

### *Temporal Agency related to present activities*

#### *Duration*

Duration of the activities of elders or mental care patients is represented as being slow in most of the media I investigated. Each patient or elder person has a preset routine and activities that take place somehow mechanical, for both patients and caregivers. However, in the media I studied, there are various episodes that interrupt this routine and where time passes in a higher pace. An example of such an event that causes rushing of activities is in “Wrinkles”, when one of the patients falls, or in Rebecca Roher’s work, when her grandmother is lost outside the facility and all actors stop their daily routines and start searching for her.

While reacting to emotional triggers, the characters in my dataset experienced time travelling episodes that allowed them to visit a place in their memory. For example, in “Wrinkles”, when Ernest’s son and daughter-in-law take him to a facility where he can be properly taken care of, he experiences loneliness and abandonment. This triggers an old memory of when he was a child and his father took him to school, where he also felt alone and scared. The medium of graphic novels proves to be an excellent instrument to illustrate Ernest’s feelings regarding that day and underlines the similarities.





Figure 1 – “Wrinkles” by Paco Roca screenshot

We see Ernest sad and scared, holding a bag in both temporal situations, not being able to express his opinion regarding the decision that was made for him but not by him. In both cases, he is not the agent of his experience, and the image illustrates the responsibility balance between Ernest with his son on the left and his father on the right. This image is also intended to create a similitude between elders and children, as being vulnerable and non-agentic individuals, for whom their caregivers take responsibility and decide in accordance with their wellbeing. Last, the image suggests a time bridge, where Ernest jumps out of the present into the past and time stays still on that experience. In this case, although Ernest does not voluntarily alter the duration of time by the fact that he does not exercise time work in this specific moment, he stops time for a few seconds, and his mind goes to a different period in time.

Mental time-travelling was observed to be rather usual in the case of patients dealing with mental diseases. In Aliceheimer’s, Alice seldom forgets that her husband, Dave, had died. So, she occasionally sees him in the tree from the family courtyard and talks to him. In these moments, Alice is not present in the current situation, and does not realize the length of the moment itself. She cannot control the duration of this experience, as the duration of activities varies in the case of mental care patients, and they have no impact on the duration. Thus, they perform no time work in this matter.

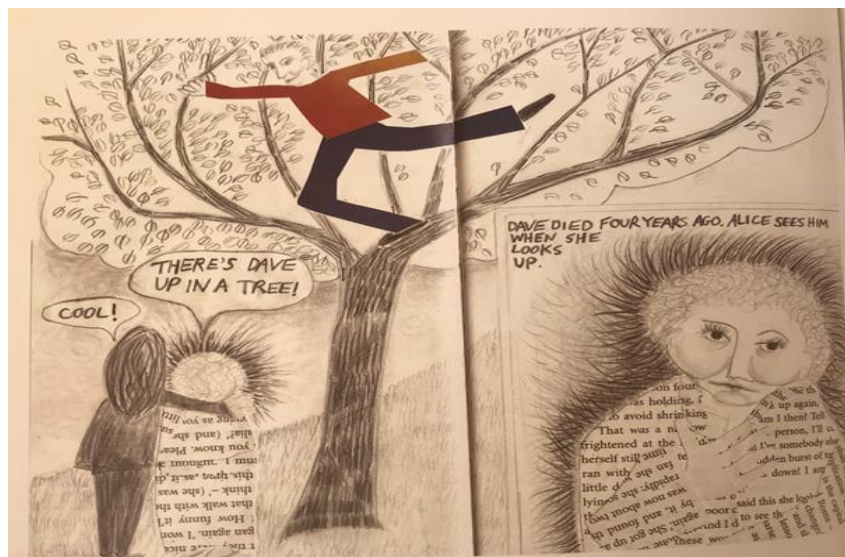


Figure 2 – “Aliceheimer’s” by Dana Walrath screenshot

The new experiences Alice is dealing with force her family- in this example, her daughter Dana- to stay in the moment with her, thus experiencing the duration of the moment set by Alice. In this example, we see that the caregiver adapts to the mentally suffering person’s involuntary agency. Contrary to the example we saw before, where Ernest is presented alone and sad, in Figure 2 presenting Alice and her daughter Dana, Dana hugs Alice and follows her imaginary plot.

Characters in my dataset, either elders or people who are suffering from a mental condition, are very reluctant to the idea of being sent to a professional facility where they are medically taken care of. This action generates sadness and frustration, because what they really want is to spend time with their family and friends, and not be taken away from their homes. In “Bird in a Cage”, the author and her family decide to send her grandmother, who suffers from dementia, to a professional home for elders, and even if the grandmother does not actively oppose to the decision, the author underlines the difficulty of the decision for the person who must leave her or his old house.

This is an example of how limited elders and mental health patients are upon expressing agency in manipulating time regarding duration, in the studied media. The responsibility of their well-being belongs to someone else, as time transfers this responsibility from the individual to his caregivers. The only remaining thing to do is to try to manipulate the duration of the moment when their family takes them to the facility, by postponing it.



Figure 3 – “Bird in a Cage” by Rebecca Roher screenshot



Figure 4 &amp; Figure 5 – “Wrinkles” by Paco Roca screenshots

However, in “Wrinkles”, when Ernest realizes that he has Alzheimer’s, he decides to take action to postpone the effects of the disease. Triggered by the visit to the “second floor”, where the disabled were being taken care of, he tries to do all that is possible to prolong his stay on the first floor, with the help of his friend. This difference between floors is also a metaphor for the independent versus the dependent, the less sick and the extremely sick, the aware and the unaware, the present and the inevitable future. In his case, he tries to postpone the effects of Alzheimer’s by keeping his mind alert and reading as much as possible, as well as labelling his personal items, so that he does not forget their name. He voluntarily manipulates the time he has left until Alzheimer’s becomes more present.



### *Frequency and sequence*

Frequency and sequence refer to how often a certain event happens and in what order actions occur. In the data investigated for this research, I analyzed how frequent activities are experienced by elders and by their caregivers as well when they take place.

Starting with their caregivers, we learn that they own the decision and exert agency upon the frequency by which events take place for the elders. They guide or perform the majority of actions, such as running errands, cleaning their home, helping them take a bath or simply performing relaxing activities for the elders such as singing.



Figure 6 – “Special exits” by Joyce Farmer  
screenshot



Figure 7 – “Bird in a Cage” by Rebecca Roher  
screenshot

In Figure 6 shown above, the daughter presented in the novel gives a bath to her senior mother, and she decides the moment of the action as well as the frequency as we learn from repetitive images. In Figure 7, Rebecca’s grandmother was feeling down and her family decides to sing a song for her, which happens once in a while, when the grandmother feels sad or alone and she is in need of cheering up.

Caregivers take on these activities gradually, as they observe that the elders cannot perform them according to the required standards. In Roz Chast’s work, we see that her parents can no longer clean their home properly, as the things they clean are still dirty with grime. So, Roz Chast must clean them again.

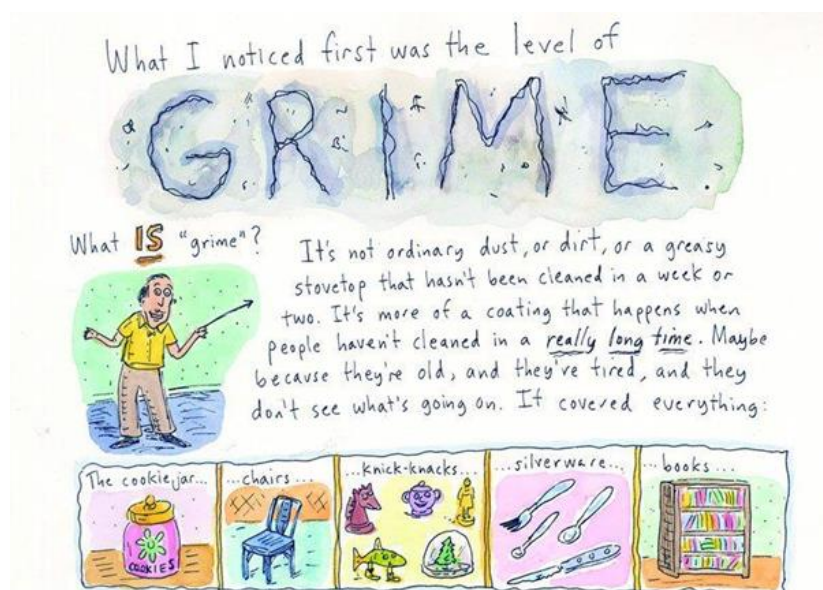


Figure 8 – “Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?” by Roz Chast screenshot

In “Special Exits”, Laura vacuums her parents’ home and helps her mother to take a bath. Another example presented in “Tangles” is where the author must frequently comb her mother’s hair.



Figure 9 – “Special Exits” by Joyce Farmer screenshot



Figure 10 – “Tangles” by Sarah Leavitt

Also in “Tangles”, we see that Midge who suffers from Alzheimer’s cannot perform the simple action of cleaning herself, so her daughter helps her with things that “need to be done”. Midge’s daughter helps her mother throughout the process step-by-step, following the known sequence of actions.

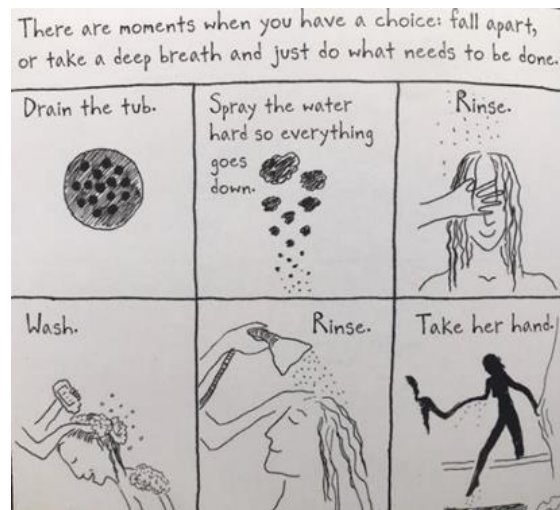


Figure 11 – “Tangles” by Sarah Leavitt screenshot

As for patients, in the studied media I could observe that they lose track of the sequence in which they used to perform activities. In “Tangles”, Midge opens the door to come out of the car but forgets the next natural step of the process, closing the door. She also has difficulties in opening doors, as she pushes them without pressing the doorknob.

The patients in the eldercare facility Ernest lives in also follow frequent daily activities, but they do not determine the frequency of these activities, as it is illustrated in the image below.



Figure 12 – “Wrinkles” by Paco Roca screenshot



### Timing

The characters in the media I studied still undertake actions in accordance with their timing, however, the concept of timing is altered in their perspective. Ernest, who used to be a bank manager, seldom recalls his old life and lives under the impression that he must go to work, so in Figure 13 below we see him shaving at 3 am because he is under the impression that it's time to go to work.



Figure 13 & Figure 14 – “Wrinkles” by Paco Roca screenshots

On a similar note, Mrs. Rose in “Wrinkles”, who thinks she is travelling on the Orient Express to Istanbul to meet her husband, believes that this time of the year is the best time to visit the Carpathians. Even if her actions are not connected to the real world, in her imaginary experience, she chooses the best time for her voyage.

In “Demented”, the main character deals with the frustrations of growing old, and the author underlines her feelings and actions, which can be seen in comparison with her husband’s reaction on ageing. An important point of view can be seen in this novel, as her husband is very calm and relaxed in all images, he does not express worry or anger towards ageing, but is presented as a supportive character for his wife. In order to stay young as much as possible, his wife decides it is time to change her appearance and straightens her hair, followed by questioning her friends how many years this new look takes from her age.



Figure 15 – “Demented” by Jacky Fleming

Following this sequence, the same character starts accepting that she is ageing and decides it is time to buy a mobile phone that is recommended for elders, a “large print phone”. She chooses to express agency in finally making amends with the idea that she is getting old, thus buying a device specially designed for elders, at the right time, and stating that the device “looks ideal”.



Figure 16– “Demented” by Jacky Fleming

### Allocation

Caregivers must adapt to the new condition of being responsible for their loved ones who grow old or suffer from a mental disease, when allocating time for their activities.

While aware that their loved ones have a limited horizon of time in front of them, they are in the situation of spending their time and energy taking care of them while also trying to continue their personal lives although the two worlds seldom interfere as in the images below. As an example, Laura in “Special Exits” is balancing through taking care of her parents and enjoying her hobbies such as dancing or going out for a drink with her friends.





Figure 17 & Figure 18 – “Special exits” by Joyce Farmer screenshots

The characters in my dataset run their daily activities with the perspective of death in their minds, even if they refuse to talk or acknowledge it as it is comically illustrated in Figure 19. Roz Chast offers a proper explanation on her parents’ refusal to discuss death for other unpleasant reasons, given the difficulties they were forced to go through in their younger times such as war, poverty, and health problems, which make them resilient to undergo any negative aspects.



Figure 19 – “Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?” by Roz Chast screenshot

In the case of Chast’s parents, they refuse to discuss unpleasant issues and prefer to stay in the moment as much as they can. While they reject unpleasant details of their past, they also refuse to think about the future, mainly because they feel there is not much future left for them.



Figure 20 – “Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?” by Roz Chast screenshot

In “Tangles”, the author beautifully shows what determines caregivers to keep on being empathic with people suffering from Alzheimer’s, as she illustrates that her mother will die sooner than other people and she wants to spend as much time as possible with her.

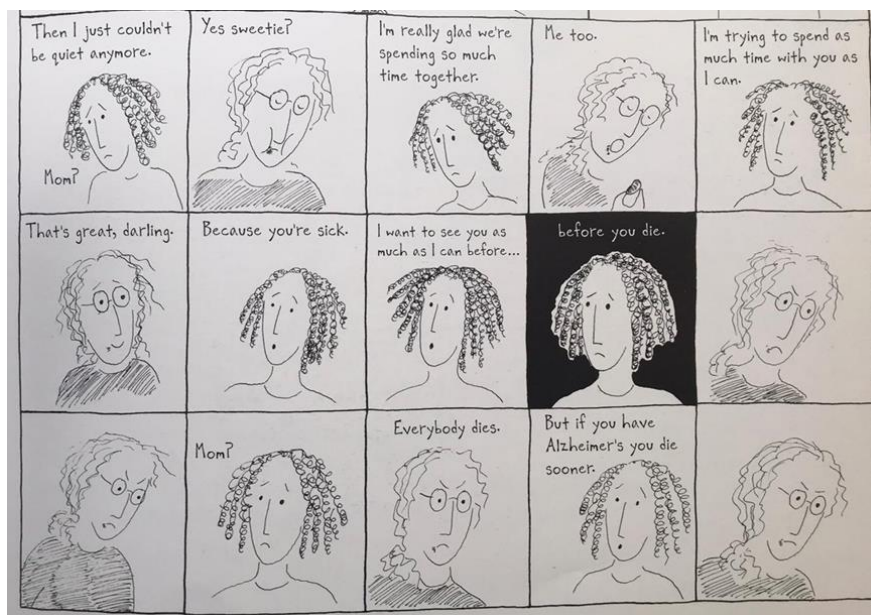


Figure 21 – “Tangles” by Sarah Leavitt screenshot

Another meaningful example is presented in *Aliceheimer’s*, where the author illustrates Alice in a confused appearance, made out of shredded paper, asking her daughter if she is her mom and who is her father, followed by a conversation that the two characters have. Alice asks Dana why she is so good to her, and Dana simply replies, “because you are my mother”. Following this answer, Alice states that she remembers treating Dana poorly, which is not referred to in the book so we might consider that the bad treatment only happened in Alice’s mind. However, Dana replies saying that she forgives Alice because Alice did the best she could.

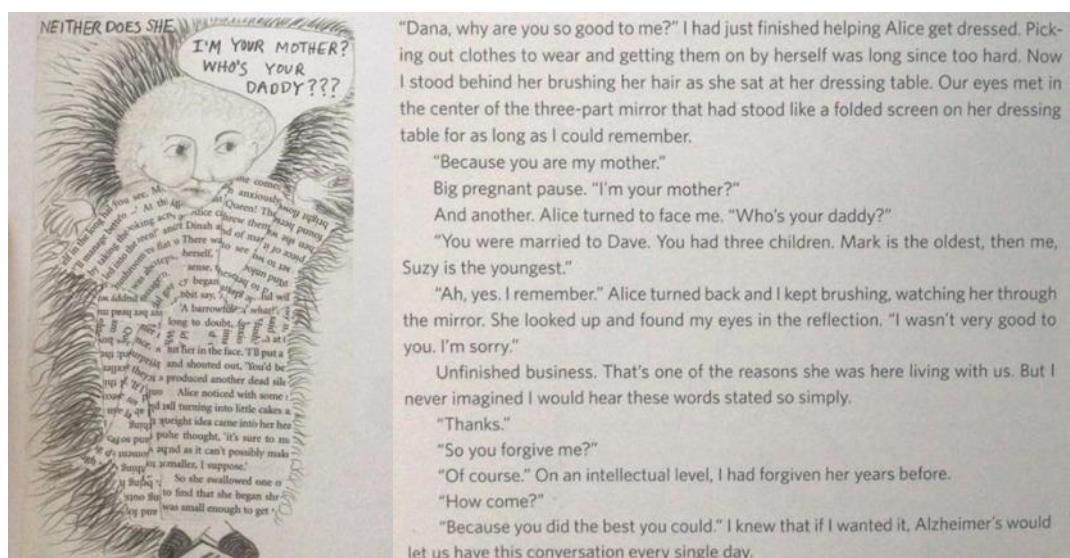


Figure 22 – “Aliceheimer’s” by Dana Walrath screenshot

In Roz Chast’s “Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?” we find a similar situation where Roz states that she forgives her mother for being over-controlling. This way, caregivers find a way to make amends with their loved ones who suffered severe mental transformations, as well as with the disease which is slowly taking parts of their loved ones, leaving them a handful of memories and regret.

### ***Temporal agency related to daily and present oriented activities***

Given the fact that my two patterns consist of a crossing of duration, frequency, sequence and timing to existential agency, pragmatic agency, identity agency to observe time work for daily activities, and the second pattern investigates activities that are oriented towards the future, where I connected allocation to agency in the life course, I am further discussing agency as observed in my dataset.

Regarding existential and pragmatic agency, I could observe that most characters that have mental diseases in the novels lose these types of agency as they are less and less capable of taking decisions and acknowledging the outside world. In the case of caregivers, they overstretch this capacity as they undertake the responsibility of taking important decisions for other individuals.

Identity agency is exercised by the cared individuals in the novels, as they continue doing things that are relevant to them. For Chast’s mother, it is relevant to keep being in control even if she is old and ill, so she keeps being active and hard-minded not to lose control. Alice in “Aliceheimer’s” realizes that she seldom mistreated her daughter and, in a possible moment of lucidity, apologizes to her as her daughter’s feelings towards her are also relevant. As for the caregivers, most of their activity in taking care of their loved ones is under the umbrella of identity agency. Contrary to caregivers who are professionals and perform this activity as a daily task, caregivers from the family find it especially important



that their loved ones have a decent experience, are well taken care of, and that they feel loved and secure.

These three types of agency were correlated to duration, sequence, frequency, and timing. They refer to the temporal dimensions that are linked to daily activities, and could be observed in the data set by looking at the interaction between patients and caregivers, as well as observing the representations of their daily routine, habits and actions.

Agency in life course was linked to allocation, to how individuals plan their activities to influence their life course. The perspective of death was present in all media in my data set, but individuals' reactions to it were different. Caregivers acknowledge that they are running out of time and find new resources and energy to look after their loved ones, knowing that they will soon lose them, either physically or mentally. Elders and Alzheimer's patients perform actions to help them postpone mental degradation. Both types of characters perform efforts to meet and stay in the same temporal point, as they are in front of a situation that puts some of them at the end of the life course. Through this process, they keep being with each other, enjoying the person they used to know as if nothing changed, and not thinking about the impossible and inexistent future.



Figure 23 – “Wrinkles” by Paco Roca screenshot

## Conclusions

In this paper I have investigated representations of time work and time perception in the selected graphic media data set, representations that are linked to old age and mental care illness associated with old age.

I have crossed Flaherty's five dimensions of time work (Flaherty, 2003) and Hitlin & Elder's types of agency (Hitlin & Elder, 2007), and thus I have identified two patterns that investigate two types of agency: present oriented agency and future oriented agency.

In graphic novels, when looking at representations of characters, I could observe that regarding duration, most activities performed by the characters in my dataset are mechanical and slow, with the exception of specific moments that interrupt the pre-set routine, and so time passes more alertly. Duration was also observed to be perceived as a flexible characteristic of time, especially for mental care patients who are not aware of the realistic passing of time, especially for patients who suffer from Alzheimer's. However, in their moments of clarity, patients suffering from Alzheimer's, who are aware of the condition, performed activities to influence the duration of time, in order to maximize the length of time they have until the disease erases all their feelings and memories. Frequency and sequence could be observed in the daily activities performed by and for patients and elders. These types of activities were represented as being usually activities that caregivers overtook from elders and mental care patients, when the latter could not perform them by themselves, such as self-care, cleaning, running errands or performing recreational activities. Regarding timing, I could observe that represented patients who suffer from mental conditions perform certain activities when they consider it to be the right time for that activity. Even in their moments of memory loss, where they think they are in a different time or space, they still perform activities in what they consider to be the right moment. In the case of elders, they perform activities that help them feel or look younger, when they consider that their body starts to age and are emotionally affected by the process. Allocation was better observed in representations of caregivers who manage their time to keep a balance between activities oriented to the present or short length future, such as caring for their loved ones, as well as activities that are linked to their long-term existence, such as allocating time for hobbies or maintenance of a healthy social life. For elders and mental care patients characters, I could not observe representations of activities linked to life goals or long-term wellbeing, since they all have the perspective of the inevitable death in their minds, either if it is something they talk about, or refuse to do so.

Existential and pragmatic agency was observed as being less represented in elders and mental care patients, and instead, 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.

There is limited evidence in the literature to uncover steps to promote dementia understanding and reduce stigmatizing thoughts and actions. Detrimental attitudes have a negative impact on the quality of care, thus developing effective solutions is critical. As a result, it is important to perform further studies on the nature of this process so that

suitable steps may be taken to mitigate the problem. As graphic media gains more popularity among consumers, it is a very good instrument for promoting messages and constructing realities. There is not much available literature on the topic of elders and patients suffering from mental or neurodegenerative diseases under the form of graphic media. However, the available novels are good material to observe representations of such people. My research offers a perspective of a limited dataset regarding agency and time work performed in the elderly care ecosystem, and it provides preliminary steps in this area. Understanding how daily activities, as well as future-oriented activities, are represented in the graphic media can have a major contribution in reducing the misunderstanding gap that comes between elders, their families and their caregivers, as well as between individuals who suffer from mental illnesses associated with ageing and other members of the society. Understanding how time is constructed and deconstructed as an institution, and understanding what determines time work and how time is perceived by all implied individuals can re-shape the social expectations that take the form of norms and social regulations.

By considering time representations for such a vulnerable category of people, we could better understand the norms of ageing as an institution, as well as the impact of the actions performed between individuals.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Author would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

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