

Do Psychology of Aging courses influence students' attitudes towards aging and older people?

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Project Background

- Motivation for our project: Our Psychology of Aging courses
- Ageism & university students
- Non-experiential learning
- Multi-site mixed-methods perspective

Purpose

- To better understand what role an undergraduate psychology of aging course has on **age related attitudes** and **perceptions** of Canadian university students.
- Could a gerontology course impact students' attitudes towards older adults, the aging process, and anxieties around their own aging?

Methodology

- Students enrolled Psychology of Aging courses at Trent University and Cape Breton University in 2018-19.
- Qualitative focus group at the end of the term (N=23)
- Quantitative questionnaire at the beginning (N=46) and end (N=42) of the term.

Quantitative Survey

	Time 1 % (N)	Time 2 % (N)
Participants	46	42
Male	15% (7)	19% (8)
Female	85% (39)	81% (34)
University		
Cape Breton	41% (19)	41% (17)
Trent	59% (27)	60% (25)
Year of Study		
2	13% (6)	17% (7)
3	50% (23)	45% (19)
4	30% (14)	31% (13)
5	7% (3)	7% (3)
Major		
Psychology	72% (33)	74% (31)
Other	28% (13)	26% (11)

Qualitative Focus Groups

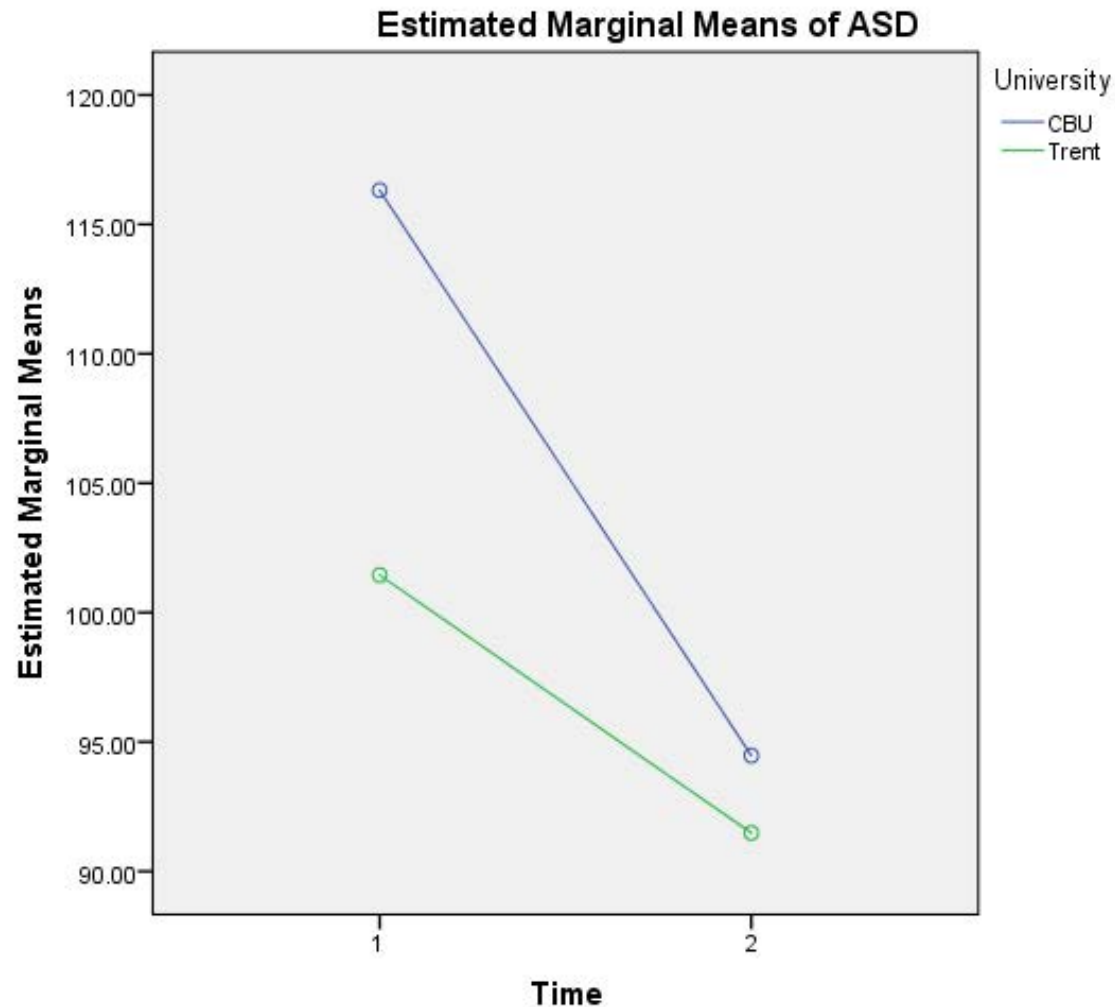
	% (N)
Participants	23
Male	26% (6)
Female	74% (17)
University	
Cape Breton	78% (18)
Trent	22% (5)
Year of Study	
2	26% (6)
3	57% (13)
4	13% (3)
5	4% (1)
Major	
Psychology	70% (16)
Other	30% (7)

Methodology

- Students enrolled Psychology of Aging courses at Trent and Cape Breton University in 2018-19.
- Qualitative focus group at the end of the term ($N=23$)
- Pre/post course quantitative measures at the beginning ($N=46$) and end ($N=42$) of the term.

Quantitative Results

Aging Semantic Differential (ASD; Rosencranz & McNevin, 1969)



Time:

$F(1,88)=14.61, p<.001$

University:

$F(1,88) = 4.61, p<.05$

ASD				
Time	University	Mean	SD	N
1	CBU	116.31	17.79	19
	Trent	101.44	19.11	27
	Total	107.58	19.81	46
2	CBU	94.47	14.08	17
	Trent	91.48	22.80	25
	Total	92.69	19.60	42
Total	CBU	106.00	19.38	36
	Trent	96.65	21.36	52
	Total	100.47	20.98	88

Qualitative Results

- Activity
- Course Content
- Health
- Stigma
- Empathy



Qualitative Results – Activity

*Volunteering for example, like a lot of, in my home town, **a lot of them volunteer and I volunteer with them** and it's fun but it's like they do that too so that they can **stay mentally active and engaged**, and it helps keep them aging on. – Trent Student*

Qualitative Results – Course Content

*We study child development and adolescents so much, **it's as if aging doesn't matter once you get to a certain age.** – CBU Student*

*I think a lot of the stuff you hear is hard. I think a lot of the stuff is hard to hear, **but it's something that we should be aware about.** – CBU Student*

*I think like the **biggest act of ageism is to not have a course talking about this** like to think that its so irrelevant that we don't even need to focus on it is like that's just perpetuating the issues so I think like every psychology department should have at least one of these kind of courses. – Trent Student*

Qualitative Results – Health

*80% of people over this age **are still living healthy great lives**, like I go to the Y and stuff with clients and I see that, at the same time, that all the healthy active older adults are there, so they offer fit classes the, you know, all the classes suited for over 50s. I see all these amazing women and there out there swimming the 80 but I **also thought that that was a smaller percentage**. I thought that they worked harder than average, that they were spending more time, but **to see the statistics prove me wrong**, so I appreciated that, and **just how much of the population ages well**, um, **I think there's a big misunderstanding there**. – Trent Student*

Qualitative Results – Stigma

They're just like us but older. That view is kind of like masked in all these stereotypes and stuff. So, it really does go to show that like, older people, yeah, they are us, but like the same. Some people are idiots, some people are rude, some people are really nice, some people are really cute, and that's just like, old people are the same way. You don't have to judge them all just by one stereotype. – CBU Student

My whole life I was bad for how I was just assuming, if I saw an old person alone they were sad. But, the class taught me there's a good chance they're living their best life and having a better time than I am. – CBU Student

Qualitative Results – Empathy

*I really liked that it kind of **changed the way I looked at like the elderly in my own life.** – Trent Transcript #1*

*I'm definitely **not scared of getting old anymore.** – CBU Transcript #2*

Discussion

- Improved attitudes toward older people
- Less fear of the aging process
- Why does this matter?
- What next?

Thank you, Merci!



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