The Well-Connected Older Adult: Exploring the Youth’s “Older Adult Self” (OAS)—Visualizations Post-Encounter With an Older Adult Community in Bagac, Bataan

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This paper sought to surface visualizations of “older adult selves” (OAS) of junior college students studying development communication after an interaction with older adults in Bagac, Bataan in the Philippines. It was done to figure out the ways by which such visualizations could be achieved through institutional efforts within an academic setting. Twenty-three students, mostly females who volunteered to participate in a reflection paper writing activity a week after the youth-older adult interaction, wrote their visions or projections of their life as older adults informed by their social exchanges with older adults in a rural community in the Philippines (Bagac, Bataan). The results indicated that an image of the well-connected older adult was shared across all narratives and it is characterized by youthfulness, openness and flexibility, and sense of accomplishment. Necessary conditions were drawn out from the data to help facilitate the fulfillment of such visions through the possible initiatives of St. Paul University Manila.

Keywords: well-connected older adult, older adult selves, visualizations, older adult community

Introduction

Some studies in neuropsychology recently reported that persons who practice positive visualization are capable of achieving to varying degrees what they envision (Adams, 2009). In particular, some cases revealed that “mental practices are almost effective as true physical practice, and that doing both is more effective than either alone” (para. 3). Some people can build muscle without lifting any weight just by simply envisioning muscle development. Natan Sharansky defeated chess world champion Garry Kasparov in 1996 after a series of mental chess he performed while he was in prison. These instances indicate that mental training, exercises, or rehearsals, now employed by many athletes, help people achieve physical goals. Accordingly, Adams wrote that “thoughts produce the same mental instructions as actions” (para. 5). Neuroplasticity, the capacity of the brain to change or reorganize itself throughout a life span of a person (Michelon, 2008), reveals that the brain continues to change as people age, contrary to the earlier belief that connections in the brain became fixed through time. That said, what people learn as they age can influence how they age.

Positive visualization draws its strength from the findings above. As a result, many things are believed to be caused by positive visualization (Seepter, 2016). Visualizing positive things was found to relieve stress as it

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calms the nerves and uplifts the spirit through reduced production of stress hormones called cortisol, increases happy hormones called encephalin and endorphins, and fortifies the immune system. It also enables a person to recover from alcohol addiction by allowing them to envision a future of sobriety that strengthens the will to overcome self-doubt and other negative beliefs. It improves mind-body coordination, confidence, learning, and physical performance. Positive visualization produces alpha waves that lead to pleasure, focus, and relaxation. It also boosts the creativity of the person as it intensifies desire that fuels the search for solutions. Aside from being an enjoyable exercise, positive visualization also helps in tapping the unconscious mind and directing unseen energy that creates vibrations to help a person accomplish goals. However, goals can be achieved only if someone has an idea as to how it looks like (Niles, 2011).

**Rationale**

Hence, seeing the idea or vision is key to positive visualization. Following the image reflecting a goal, one must rehearse it mentally as if it were a ritual. This paper anchors itself on the creation of the idea on which one can fix one’s visualization exercise, for without it any exercise is futile. In particular, this paper tried to look at the creation of images of personal aging among the youth (college students of the communication program in St. Paul University Manila), after an encounter with the older adults in Bagac, Bataan. This enterprise was deemed important because there is currently a wide gap between the two generations that can potentially benefit from each other (B. Bantugan, F. Bantugan, & Urbano, 2018). The gap must be bridged to help the older adults’ need for connection and social support, and the youth to live the present and imagine futures that are informed by the experiences of the older adults. Bridging the gap means reducing the sense of alienation towards each other in both parties. Such future visions, however, must be founded on real encounters with older adults.

However, due to the present gap between youths and the older adult population, visions of the former’s future and aging are replete with the wisdom of the latter. Senior care also does not involve the youth, revealing social planning and services that do not involve the youth. The strength of the community lies in the connections built between the two groups (Bethesda Health, 2015). This social fragmentation brings about the phenomenon of the alienated youth who endanger social order (Jury, 1995), and the alienated older generation that refuses to accept and understand new cultural forms (Marinova, 2013). If each group’s negative attitude to learning about each other is indicative of anything, it is that their respective brains are hardly helped by social conditions to reconfigure itself to accommodate the other.

**The Rising Population of Older Adults**

There has been a dramatic rise in the older adult population globally (National Institutes of Health, 2016). From 8.5% of the people worldwide, they are expected to jump to almost 17% by 2050, roughly equivalent to 1.6 billion. The World Health Organization expects most of the increase to be coming from developing countries (Garza, 2016). Increasing life expectancy among the older adults is seen as a result of a shift from communicable infections to chronic non-communicable diseases being the leading cause of death by 2050, Garza added. The developed countries worry about the financial cost of such a scenario on their side, and the foreseen shortage of health care professionals and family caregivers who can adequately address the consequent increase in demand for health services.

Unlike developing countries, however, the developed countries are more able to face the financial burden that will come with the dramatic increase in their respective older adult population. The developing countries will not be as capable because the sharp increase in the number of the aging population comes together with a
continuing decrease in fertility rates that will result in the decline of the working-age populations who are expected to support the former’s medical and pension requirements (Hsu, 2016). Likewise, having more informal sectors in the developing country will further constrain the country’s ability to meet the rising health costs via tax collection. Hsu recommends from an economic standpoint, in the case of Thailand, to create a policy that lowers the cost of education to “improve human capital, reduce the size of the informal sector, and increase economic output” (para. 28).

From an educational standpoint, allowing greater access to education can enhance social support required by older adults. New and growing evidence points to the reality that medicine and healthcare can only do so much to enhance the health of the general population; living and working conditions are even more important (Government of Canada, 2013) in that they help minimize health risks, and improve social support and management of illnesses. Social support networks and education are two of many other key factors that improve a population’s general well-being. “(C)oping skills and a sense of control and mastery over life” (para. 4) are further developed in and enhanced by higher quality education and greater social support contributes to better health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005). The same applies to the health of older adults. However, the problems of the older adults persist and there is very little that can be seen in the area of social support or the “real or perceived resources provided by others that enable a person to feel cared for, valued, and part of a network of communication and mutual obligation” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005, para. 1), and education that is directed towards the welfare of the older adults.

State of social support for older adults. The decline in social support is a reality all older adults face. “Increased likelihood of living alone, death of family members or friends, retirement or poor health” (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2004, p. 3) are associated with aging and these conditions lead to a sharp decline in social support not found in other age groups. When seniors live longer, are forced to move residence, and have fewer children to rely on in their family, the problem takes a turn for the worse. These are conditions faced by older adults in developed and developing countries. Thus, the decline in social support when someone ages is further made serious in countries where the cost of living is high and younger working generations have no time for activities that have no economic value.

In the Philippines, as more and more places urbanize, the same plight will be experienced by the older adult population. Currently, one in two Filipinos lives in urban spaces (Basingan & Ilagan, 2012). There are no signs that urbanization will slow down, especially in places with high economic productivity—a goal desired for all places seeking autonomy and growth. This means that social support will continue to decline for the Filipino older adult unless urbanization slows down or is reversed through the intellectualization of the economy (from presence-based to information-based), popularization of telecommuting (remote working), and making attractive non-urban areas to the young working class (Hartmann, 2011). In the meantime, the older adults in rural settings will be left to their own limited devices to deal with their needs as their children and grandchildren aspire to succeed in their target cities of economic prosperity. Hence, there is a great need to solve the diminishing social support for the Filipino older adult.

State of education for older adult wellbeing. As more and more youths find themselves separated from their grandparents and older adults, in general, the more they will experience a sense of alienation from older adults. In developed countries, myths about the older adults circulate among the youth, necessitating the development of inter-generational learning tools (programsforelderly.com, n.d.) for young audiences. In general, inter-generational learning is pursued in developed countries with high older adult populations, particularly in
Europe, to (1) develop give-and-take relationships between the youth and the older adults; (2) enable youths and older adults to acquire patience and become updated with developments and trends that affect each other; and (3) bridge gaps between generations and assist in skills development in both groups (Benyon et al., 2010). Developing countries that have lower older adult populations have yet to follow suit in this kind of initiative.

In Asia, the first international conference on intergenerational programming happened in Singapore in March 2002 and was attended by government and non-government agencies from Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Japan (Thang, Kaplan, & Henkin, 2003). The conference provided data that help establish the varying terrains and possibilities of intergenerational programming across participating countries. Intergenerational programming, or the “purposeful bringing together of different generations in ongoing, mutually beneficial planned activities designed to (1) foster relationships between youth and seniors, (2) enhance personal strengths and quality of life, and (3) provide intergenerational programs and services” (Linkages, n.d., pp. 3-4), has yet to formalize as a structure addressing generation gaps.

In the Philippines, since grandparents remain available as carers, emergency parents, or near-custodial grandparents (weekday parents) to their grandchildren, and skipped-generation households (households with grandparents substituting for migrant worker-parents) “are not uncommon”, intergenerational program is not yet an urgent need. Hence, there is a dearth in the literature on intergenerational programs that have yet to manifest. Nevertheless, discrimination based on age exists and has become a pressing concern (Growingoldorjuststaging, n.d.), especially among the older adults whose disconnection from the youth is gravely worsened by their aversion to technology and their absence in mainstream media (B. Bantugan, F. Bantugan, & Urbano, 2018) and negatively impacts their health status. As such, the need for intergenerational programs exists despite the perceived strong family-orientedness of Filipinos. However, as the need for intergenerational programs remains hidden or unrecognized, not much can be done to address ageism or the problems it causes in the lives of older adults. For now, only gerontology and geriatrics are the only institutionalized entry points to learning about older adults or intergenerational programs in the academic setting, and not many youths have access to these fields of study.

Study Framework

There are two types of visualization and the use of the two is considered crucial in achieving goals (Niles, 2011). The first is “outcome visualization” which “involves envisioning yourself achieving your goal… (requiring the creation of) a detailed mental image of the desired outcome using all of (one’s) senses” (para. 12). The second is “process visualization” or the “envisioning (of) each of the actions necessary to achieve the outcome (wanted), (f)ocus(ing) on completing each of the steps (one) need(s) to achieve (one’s) goal, but not on the overall goal itself” (para. 15). The second stems from an acknowledgment of the likely internal or external obstacles (Oettingen, Timur Sevincer, & Gollwitzer, 2018), and consequently, actions that must be taken to succeed. The specificity of the visioning is what distinguishes visualization from fantasizing (Oettingen, Timur Sevincer, & Gollwitzer, 2018) and the presence of an actual plan of action is required in the mental rehearsal, that, given the “necessary conditions” related to “strength of the intention, commitment, personality, the number of intentions, external environmental support, (and) feedback” (p. 382), could lead to success.

Visualizations are informed by experiential learning. Experiential learning helps moderate the “necessary conditions” that can materialize the visualized plan. This study assumes that the university is capable of
shaping the visions of the students by designing processes that lead to the experiential learning desired and, as such, it must direct those visions towards greater well-being of the youth and older adults both in the present and in the future whenever possible. However, the “necessary conditions” that could result in the fulfillment of the OAS visualizations of the students will depend more on the state of affairs in each students’ circumstances, over which the university has very limited influence, unless the institution makes it a deliberate action where students are allowed to generate meanings that are personally relevant to them. This study assumes that the importance and meanings that students give to their social encounter with the older adults could help surface the necessary conditions that could be developed or established by the institution within its power as an educational organization. Below (see Figure 1) is the representation of the framework.

![Study framework](image)

**Figure 1. Study framework.**

**Statement of the Problem**

This study looked at the visualizations of the selected students as a reflection of a potentially more desirable state of social integration between the youth and older adults, and conditions of the older adults in the future as a result of their social interaction. Such visualizations could be the starting points of regular mental exercises or positive visualizations among them, which is currently lacking. This paper attempted to unveil projected older adult futures of the youth, coming from selected students who were informed by their encounter with selected older adults from Bagac, Bataan. In particular, the data generated answered the following questions: (1) What visualizations of OAS are generated by the social encounter between the selected college students and their older adult counterparts?; (2) what common themes (based on experiential learning) underlie the OAS visualizations of the selected students?; (3) what are the potential older adult futures of the students that are apparent in their OAS visualizations?; and (4) what interventions are needed to achieve more positive OAS visualizations in students?

**Methodology**

This study was designed as a qualitative inquiry that sought to investigate the visions of OAS of selected junior communication students of St. Paul University Manila. Communication students organize an annual program that facilitates a personal encounter between young people and the older adults in Bagac, Bataan (an adopted community of the College of Arts and Sciences through the Communication Program) in the Luzon island of the Philippines. The youth-older adult program started in 2014 as a way to provide service-learning opportunities to students in the academic context, particularly in their Development Communication course. Service-learning is a process where students learn about service in their academic engagements.
Development Communication, a course taught by the researcher, students are enabled to use their communication skills and technologies to help address social issues and solve consequent problems. In this case, the problem was to bridge the lack of socialization between the youth and the older adults, which, when addressed, can lead to the desired social integration.

The program consisted of socialization and gift-giving, where students were tasked to generate funds, create and facilitate interactions between the students and the older adults in the community, prepare and distribute food, and give tokens of appreciation to them. The program, implemented on December 2, 2017, was designed as a Christmas party for them, sponsored by the students. It was imperative during the program that students find one-on-one time with an older adult who was assigned to them during registration, and to converse with them lengthily at the time allotted (around three hours) after the entertainment presentations and games. A week after, the students were asked to reflect on their experiences with the older adult and answer questions that required them to envision themselves as older adults and the kind of life they desire and can foresee for themselves. There were 23 students, between the age of 19 and 20, who submitted reflection papers, only one of whom was male. The essays were broken down into smaller units that were relevant to the questions posed by the study. Thematic analysis was used to draw out notions that cut across all responses, primarily those that stemmed from their experiential learning and led to projected futures as OAS, using a matrix of analysis.

**Results**

The interaction between the students of St. Paul University Manila and the older adult community in Bagac, Bataan was designed to generate experiential learning in each student. What they learned is deemed necessary to form the visualization of their OAS of the students. The interactions resulted in the following visualizations and necessary conditions towards their achievement.

**Visualizations of OAS**

The selected students who were able to interact with selected older adults in Bagac, Bataan who were members of a senior citizens organization wrote scenarios of their future aging as related to the narratives that were shared with them by the latter during their visit.

**At home with family.** Most, if not all, students expressed a future where they were still connected to their families. Some wanted to remain connected to their children and grandchildren, even to extended family members. In their homes, they see themselves able to support their family members and bring happiness in their lives. They see their family members as being productive and living a life which they were instrumental in shaping. They see themselves living in a home where love is present and provided to the older adults as much as they are provided to the young.

They see a home that is receptive to their needs as older adult members. They want a home that has understanding, kindness, respect, care, and patience for the older adult, and can offer physical assistance when they struggle with domestic chores. This reveals that they desire to remain active at home and would not mind being helped only in a situation where they can no longer manage on their own. The knowledge that they are in an environment where there are people who care for them and who can help them when the need arises is a source of security for them. The grandchildren are particularly mentioned as being receptive to their needs. Grandchildren are seen as manifestations of the good that they have accomplished when they were still rearing their children.
Their desired home in their old age is also seen as full of memories or enabling them to go back to their younger years. Hence, the homes desired by the future OAS of the selected students are spaces that welcome and allow memories to flourish. They, as older adults, do not want to forget their past. Homes must, therefore, help remind them of their younger years.

Celebrating the youthful, creative, and ever-changing self. The future OAS of the selected students celebrate youth as part of an older adult’s life. Youth is expressed as actions that make them look more youthful and a mindset that allows them to experience new things despite their age. They want to be able to care for themselves (grooming and fashion), learn more about current events (reading about the news), and ideas, both old and new (literature). Their future OAS are full of excitement and hope for the future. Their OAS keep to the activities of their youth, especially as they relate to being able to do things spontaneously. They have an older adult life that still gives them freedom, allowing creativity and innovation. Their older adult years are years full of vitality and inspiration. They wish to become older adults who are open to change.

Their OAS are fond of reminiscing about their past lives, including pleasant and painful experiences when they were younger. One could see that the OAS are celebrated in the context of their vast range of experiences. Celebrating the OAS also means compensating for what they have not been able to experience in their earlier years. This means a life that seeks simplification and setting of priorities to allow for time and greater freedom and spontaneity for the self, instead of others, which they have always done when they were younger. Being aware that life is getting shorter for older adults, the students want to see themselves as older adults who can enjoy each moment in their lives, the same way only younger people do nowadays. Being in the moment is something that they associate with happiness in their futures as older adults and spontaneity which is much easier to live out when one is younger. Unlike the youth, their desire to experience more freedom and spontaneity in their older adult lives arises from realizing their limits as human beings and embracing experiences in their youth with more joy. As such, celebrating the OAS means not being sorry for one’s self, not easily surrendering to a challenge, and fully accepting their past and helplessness. Making peace with their flawed selves meant being stronger and happier on their own, despite their families, and being content and happy with what they possess.

Living in a supportive community. The students projected their lives as older adults as being supported by society, even by the youth. This was sparked by their experience as youth serving the older adults during the program that brought joy to the latter. Putting themselves in the shoes of the latter, they realized the importance of the youth in the older adult’s quality of life. They are particularly keen on the youth not diminishing their value as a result of their age and the vulnerabilities that come with it. Connection with the youth is especially important because it helps them feel that they are still relevant and valued in a time where they feel least connected.

Not only do they want to find support from their immediate community, especially from the youth, they also see themselves as older adults who are still capable of enabling and supporting those who need them. They want to inspire the youth, in particular, in the same way that the older adults in Bagac inspired them. They want to serve as role models to help guide the youth of their futures. They want their stories and words of wisdom to serve some good to the youth. The easiest way to be accepted by the youth is for the youth to feel comfortable with them.

Aside from the youth, they also want an older adult life that has room to serve anyone who needs them, their fellow older adults, in particular, and the country, in general. This suggests that their OAS prefer to have a form of agency outside of their families, as well. They want to continue being enablers in their community, and not becoming mere beneficiaries of others who are more capable of helping people in need.
Sustained connectedness. Overall, what can be easily seen in these narratives is a future of connectedness. The students project an older adult life that sustains a connection to the self, significant others, and the community at large. This sense of connectedness is something that is diminishing in the lives of older adults. A lack of such connectedness results in an increasing sense of loss and anxiety that current conditions are not able to address. This intense need for connection in the OAS was expressed and understood during the youth-older adult encounter in Bagac, Bataan, and was something that the students hope will not happen to them. They recognized that their encounter is a way by which such a need can be eased, even if momentarily. This “connected” future, is an aspiration arising from the same desires from the older adults the students encountered and served. The similarity in aspirations between the two age-differing groups suggests that there was truly a connection that was established during the encounter, and as a result, the students were able to resonate with the deepest desires of the older adults they met and stayed with even for only a few hours.

Themes Underlying the OAS Visualizations

Youthfulness. Youthfulness that was found in the OAS visions of the students had many dimensions. The first is that they want to keep their youthful physical characteristics, when possible. Second, as older adults, the students see themselves as able to care for the youth in their families and outside. Some students elaborated that caring is being actively involved in the growth of the youth and serving as an inspiration. Third, as older adults with waning health and strength, they also see a common future where they desire to be cared for by the younger generations. Fourth, youthfulness is also manifested as being filled with memories of their youth. Spending time with the youth, according to one student, could be an older adult’s entry point to memories of their youth. To another student, aging would involve going back to memories of their youth, especially friendships that made it memorable. Finally, youthfulness also refers to their engagement in activities that are often associated with younger people and those which they would have done or failed to do in their youth. These youthful engagements may still be performed in one’s senior years. Such engagements, overall, reflect a happy and healthy life that they associate with youthfulness, in general.

Matrix 1. Summary of narratives falling under the theme of “Youthfulness”

| Manner of manifestation          | Areas                          |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Care for the self                | Self                          |
| Care for the youth               | Family and community          |
| Desire to be cared for by the youth | Family and community        |
| Memories from youth             | Family, self, and community   |
| Vigor and activeness of youth    | Family and self               |

Openness and flexibility. Openness and flexibility were shown in three ways in the visions of the students. One way of showing flexibility and openness in old age is by being able to address each situation uniquely, indicating a veering away from rigidity often associated with being old. Another way of manifesting openness and flexibility is with new experiences and ideas. It may also be reflected in an openness to stories that have become constant in someone’s life such as grief. Spontaneity also reflects the sense of openness and flexibility that the students see in their old age. For the most part, they look forward to retirement as it signals a breaking away from the formal structures of their life, responsibilities, and roles that they had to take on and perform as part of adulthood.
Strength and support. Another theme that cuts across all the visions of the students is “Emotional Strength and Support”. The first dimension of this theme refers to their need for support as older adults. This need for support is mostly desired from the younger generation, and not merely in the form of physical assistance, but also moral support. And yet, despite their need for various types of support, they need to find ways to independently support themselves—this is the second dimension—and others (third dimension), mostly the youth. In all these dimensions, there is a greater desire to help one’s self and others, suggesting “agency” despite old age and its related vulnerabilities. One statement by a student was quite revealing in that s/he saw very little value attached to money, fame, and pride in old age, which is likely a narrative that they learned from the older adults and with which they also resonated.

Sense of accomplishment. The students also underscored a sense of accomplishment that characterized their visualized older adult years. This was constituted of five areas. The first is the independence that they still wanted to see in themselves as older adults. This sense of independence was attached to having the freedom to detach from the humdrum of everyday life, lack of any need to work to survive, capacity to detach from the past, coming to terms with one’s lack of control over situations, ability to continue caring regardless of the state of one’s affairs, capacity to transcend childishness, and power to live independent of others.

Accomplishment in the older adults can also be seen in their capacity to live out or “maintaining a lifestyle of choice” that they have kept for so long or that gives options that were not previously unavailable to them or difficult to choose. This meant being able to serve their families, adapting to the latest trends, ability to engage in many forms of leisurely and exciting activities, seek relaxation whenever possible, live a stable and comfortable life, spend more time with loved ones, and life-long learning. Mobility, for instance, in the context of aging, may be considered an accomplishment in that many older adults are relatively less mobile compared to the youth.

“Agency and achievement”, meanwhile, pertain to being able to influence others or achieve something greater for one’s self and others, and contributing to greater self-worth or social value. This translates to having a degree of influence on the lives of the younger generations, related to them or otherwise, or power over the quality of their lives. This also means recognizing what one has accomplished throughout one’s life, specifically, having made a difference in the lives of family members. Similarly, this pertains to continuously fighting for and taking charge of one’s life despite the challenges. Ultimately, this was seen by a student in an older adult who has found happiness and peace in his/her life and found stories worth telling out of the
experiences that made it possible. This manifests as a sense of pride in one’s self, and a desire to share one’s lessons to others who might benefit from it.

“Integrity and passion” also constitute their sense of accomplishment in their senior years. One student was particularly interested in being able to live out a socially relevant life, promoting justice and democratic freedoms. Others expressed having reached a high level of integrity by saying that they have made peace with their youth, or negative experiences, or their past, overall. Hence, they find a beautiful story in the totality of their lives, and pride in the choices they have made, having made progress throughout the years, sticking to the non-selfish values, or simply keeping themselves healthy until late adulthood. Passion, on the other hand, lies in having sustained interests that they believe make them better people. Whether it is learning musical instruments, helping other people, reminiscing one’s adventures, promoting a better society, knowing more about the world, or serving family members, keeping to one’s passion despite the tolls and challenges of aging are considered achievements worth noting by the students.

Finally, “happiness and health”, is a key aspect of the OAS visions of the students concerning their sense of accomplishment in old age. Independence, maintaining a lifestyle of choice, agency, and achievement, and integrity and passion are relevant only in so far as they lead them to happy and healthy lives in their senior years.

Matrix 4. Summary of narratives falling under the theme of “Sense of Accomplishment”

| Manner of manifestation       | Areas                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Independence                 | Self                       |
| Maintaining a lifestyle of choice | Self                   |
| Agency and achievement       | Family, self, and community|
| Integrity and passion         | Family, self, community    |
| Happiness and health          | Self                       |

Potential Futures of the Older Adults Made Apparent by the OAS Visualizations of Students

The visualizations of OAS of the students and the themes that underlie them reveal areas of life and aspirations that arise from their interactions with the older adults. Many, if not most or all, of the visualizations draw from the actual lives of the older adults the students encountered, manifesting projections of the future that are strongly connected to bonds created during the organized interaction.

The well-connected older adult (WOA). The futures that were surfaced present a well-connected older adult, a person who can connect not only with family members and their community members but also with themselves. If the selected students were to become the visions they expressed, the older adult of the future is far from isolated or alienated from social circles that personally matter to them the most and their inner lives. It is a kind of connectedness that stems from the actual realities of younger people, considering their highly socialized lives, and which becomes harder to find among older adults today. The older adults of today have more time to reflect on their lives; hence, they possess a greater connection to the self. However, their connection to their families and larger social circles is on the decline. Meanwhile, the youth, while having social lives that continue to expand, have a lesser capacity to look within themselves as they tend to be more outward-looking, and, therefore, opposite the tendency of older people who have lesser prospects for the future.

The narratives above, nevertheless, point to a future older adult group that continues to look forward and connect with others in different capacities. It is the kind of older adult that is frustrated by the decline of social
life in older adulthood. It is the kind of older adult that directs self-awareness or self-connection towards such a decline and its corresponding physical challenges. It is a kind of visualization from students that is made possible by the organized interaction between them and the older adults, and, as such, may be absent in students who never find themselves in any similar interaction.

**Bonded to the youth.** This WOA draws life from its strong bond with younger people. Given the choice, they will opt to live with their children and grandchildren and engage with the youth of the community to serve as guides or mentors. They see value in their experiences and accomplishments, especially as they relate to the lives of the younger generation. This emergent older adult is rejuvenated by the youth. The more connected they are to the youth, the more they seek to care for themselves, open to new experiences, and support young people in the community. They seek to be involved in the formation of the youth.

**Constant learning.** The WOA of the future is someone who continues to learn in his or her regular social interactions, passions, and interests. Desiring to be continually relevant to the younger generation, this WOA seeks to be open and flexible. As such, the WOA is not bound to personal problems; he or she is also concerned about challenges that the young people face. Having lived a life of caring for other people, as a result of his or her socially-anchored existence, he or she will remain intent on caring as a matter of habit and would seek to improve his or her skills and knowledge to be of constant assistance to those relevant to him or her. The WOA seeks constant self-development and would draw strength and meaning from his or her constant expansion as a person, despite his or her physical limitations.

**Surplus of support.** The WOA not only acknowledges his or her physical limitations but also transcends those limitations when possible. He or she seeks to live independently, that is, avoiding dependence on anyone to survive as an older adult. Given the opportunity, the WOA will provide social support to those who need it; this points to an empowered older adult, who is humble enough to seek help from others if he or she has exhausted all his or her faculties to address his or her personal needs. He or she gives back generously to the community. The WOA seeks to be an active member of groups that address different social problems where they can significantly contribute despite their inadequacies.

**Self-confident persons of character.** The WOA has a good sense of his or her life journey, work, and challenges. He or she has principles and has lived them out to the utmost extent possible. He or she has a strong sense of self-worth, knowing what he or she is capable of doing based on what he or she has so far accomplished or failed to achieve in life. The WOA remains steadfast in his or her passions and social engagements despite his or her limitations. He or she cares about his or her happiness and health and can set limits to his or her participation without feeling guilt or shame in his or her decisions. The WOA remains full of life, practices self-care, and draws much fuel from his or her past experiences and convictions that have been tested by time. He or she is an inspirational member of the community. He or she decides to be productive and helpful as long as he or she can.

Overall, it is clear that the interaction that was organized for the students of St. Paul University Manila and the older adults of Bagac, Bataan resulted in a vision of an empowered older adult. As such, the interaction could be considered empowering for students in that they were able to see positive prospects for themselves. These prospects could be the start of mental rehearsals or exercises that could influence the way they live their lives to attain such visions in the future. The results suggest that such an interaction is key to positive visualization and may be used to direct the formation of the youth.
Discussion

Necessary Conditions: Interventions Towards the Attainment of Positive OAS Visualizations of Students

Continued youth-older adult interactions. As the results indicate, the said organized interaction between the older adults and the students produced positive visualizations among the latter, presenting empowered OAS that seek to contribute to the development of society, in general, and the youth, in particular. As the students remained in touch with themselves and the aspiration of the older adults they interacted with, their visions revealed a future with older adults who are fully integrated into the lives of the youth and vice versa. This sense of connectedness, while accomplished in the short-term and temporarily by the limited organized interaction, helps crystallize possibilities that would otherwise not have been formed in the minds of the youth. Hence, the said interaction must be sustained and further enhanced to lead to actual positive visualization exercises, meaning, repetitive visualization activities that seek to elaborate “process visualization” more.

Initiate positive visualization exercises. Much of the learning in higher education is directed towards mastery of knowledge and the formation of skills needed in employment. The possibilities embedded in such a learning environment orient the students to short-term economic prospects that are alienated from long-term development and life-long learning that can help persons prepare for retirement or older adulthood. This study suggests that positive visualization is capable of surfacing long-term targets or goals that go beyond economic goals or possibilities. If one were to assume that being clear with one’s objectives or goals helps in the development or design of strategies and tools towards their achievement, a vision of a WOA necessitates and calls for the same in each student, given that they are introduced to positive visualization exercises that deliberately lead them to such an end.

Elaborate process visualization. While to the students it was easy to visualize their OAS because they had actual references and anchors in the older adults they interacted with in the socialization project, there is a challenge to visualize the ways through which such OAS can be achieved. Awareness of the big picture that contributes to the present plight of the older adult could help anchor their visions to realities that contribute to their plight. Social analysis that involves the voices/discourses of the older adults in specific contexts must become part of the education of the youth and the resulting youth involvement in the analyses must lead to “process-visualizations” that were lacking in their responses and that are more likely to produce results leading to the actualization of the visions of their OAS.

Integration of the WOA in education. The WOA that emerged from this study must be embodied in the education that seeks to propagate such an image towards its achievement. There are already WOAs in actual communities; however, they are not embedded as WOA formators in the educational system at the tertiary level. They are, nevertheless, active as field experts whose focus is content in specific disciplines and practices. They do not speak as older adult members of society and, as a consequence, speak about “non-older adult” matters. This is the way things are as one’s age is considered not an important facet of one’s personhood or educational value; hence, productive and empowered aging is a discourse that is not leveraged by those who have all the experience to speak or elaborate about it. There is no space for learning about WOAs in higher education. There should be an actual WOA that must be at the forefront of this endeavor.

Institutionalization of the WOA. For the WOA to become a reality in the future, an institution such as St. Paul University Manila must declare the achievement of the WOA as a clear and specific goal of its education. If life-long learning has become one of the key targets of higher education in the country and outside, then,
WOA should be stated as a clear indicator of said construct that must be inculcated in all its students. Besides making it a formal and institutional commitment at the conceptual level, the said concept of WOA must be integrated into courses where it is relevant. Institutional processes and rituals must require the participation of WOAs, whenever possible. WOAs must be identified as visible members of the institution as a productive and formative community. Issues that affect the older adults must become part of the academic and non-academic concerns of the institution.

Conclusions

The results of the study suggest that students’ positive experiences with older adults from a different socio-cultural context can shape their OAS visualizations. Specifically, how they see themselves in their older adult years echoes in varying ways the realities and aspirations of the older adults they have personally encountered in the community they visited. These OAS visualizations are mostly positive and point to the notion of the WOA, which literatures report as being a distinct characteristic of older adults that live better lives compared to those that suffer from social isolation and lack of social support, medical services aside. Knowing this, there is value in sustaining interactions between older adults and students. Assuming that the university is able to provide positive interactions and connections between them, and the positive OAS of the latter is developed continuously throughout their formation in the university via quality process visualization, which together with outcome visualization ensures the fulfillment of the OAS, the university is likely to contribute not just to their professional development but ultimately to their future as older adults. This implies that universities can provide better service and education to students (even after they graduate) by including older adults in their holistic formation. This will have significant socio-economic consequences in the long term.

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