



**Evaluation of the "THIRD AGE" Series**  
**FINAL REPORT**

Presented to BBC Education

by

**Andrew Sixsmith PhD. and Judith Sixsmith PhD.**

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. METHODOLOGY	7
3. OUTLINE OF THE SERIES	9
4. IN-DEPTH PANEL RESEARCH	13
5. IN-DEPTH EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES	35
6. RESULTS OF TOPS QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY	51
7. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS	60
8. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	64
9. CONCLUSIONS	66
APPENDIX	71

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# SUMMARY OF REPORT

## OVERVIEW OF THE THIRD AGE SERIES

The "Third Age" series comprised 10 programmes transmitted between October 21st and December 23rd 1993, on BBC2 at 2.00pm on Thursdays. The series succeeded others for older viewers, such as "Prime Time", but was to be of a very different character, both in terms of its "message" and format. The BBC also produced a free magazine to accompany the series, with financial support from the European Commission as part of the European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between the generations. The title, "The Third Age", refers to that time of life after a person's main career or job has finished and children have left home and before the "Fourth Age", the time of increasing frailty, dependence and finally death. Broadly speaking this is the years between ages 50 and 75, which now accounts for about 13 million people in Britain. Unlike the common social images of old age, the vast majority of these people are fit, active and independent.

## KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE SERIES

The series aimed to raise awareness of issues relating to ageing and later life and, in particular, to promote a more positive image of older people. The target audience was people aged over 50 years, but could appeal to people of all ages. There were four main objectives:

- to challenge the generally negative images and stereotypes of old age
- to show that the "Third Age" can be surprising, adventurous, and rich in diversity
- to give insights into how people in the Third Age are changing their lives or responding to change
- to offer role models and to inspire people to take up new activities such as education, work or leisure opportunities

The specific content of the programmes was very varied, drawing primarily on the experiences of ordinary people and told in their own words. However, the programmes did have identifiable themes: lifestyle; relationships; causes and the inner person.

The series had a popular tone that is more "tabloid than broadsheet" and is faster paced than is normally expected in programmes "of this type". The tone of the programmes is argumentative and a little subversive, preferring the maverick and the surprising to the expected and the bland. A key aspect of the programmes is that they have no voice over or presenter. In this sense the items featured in the programmes have to "speak for themselves" in terms of conveying the key message(s) to the viewer.

## THE RESEARCH

The research had two objectives. Firstly, information has been provided on viewers reactions to the programme, in terms of likes and dislikes, viewing preferences and behaviours and attitudes towards the programmes. However, a second and more fundamental aim has been to assess whether the series has had an impact on the attitudes and behaviour of its target audience. Did the underlying message of the programme - to make the most out of life in the later years - get translated into new ways of thinking about later life and the uptake of new activities, hobbies and interests? This question was approached in two ways:

- by asking viewers whether the programmes had influenced them
- by independently monitoring changes in attitudes and behaviour

The research involved a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches:

**In-depth panel:** 22 people were asked to watch at least three of the programmes at the time of transmission. These people were interviewed before, during and after the series to document opinions about the series and changes in attitudes and behaviour. The panel members also filled in short questionnaires on each of the programmes that they watched.

**Questionnaire survey:** A self-completion questionnaire was sent out to people requesting the Third Age magazine.

**TOPS questionnaire:** The Television Opinion Panel Survey included two sets of questions pertaining to the Third Age series.

## OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE SERIES

In general, the research indicates that:

- viewers very much enjoyed the programmes and that negative comments were of fairly marginal significance
- as a result of watching the series, many viewers changed their ideas about themselves and old age in general and also adopted a more active approach to life

## WHAT VIEWERS LIKED ABOUT THE SERIES

Viewers were very positive towards the programmes, with the majority rating being "liked the programmes a lot". Nearly a third of the TOPS viewers watched four or more of the programmes and actively tried to watch the programmes every week and appeared to like the programmes more over time, indicating that the Third Age worked very well as a series. Programmes were rated as interesting, enjoyable, educational, covering a wide range of issues, thought provoking, good quality, not difficult to understand. Very few people used negative words such as "boring" to describe the programmes. People said that they

particularly liked to see older people enjoying themselves and keeping active and busy. People were also very much in favour of further programmes for the older viewer.

### **WHAT PEOPLE DISLIKED ABOUT THE SERIES**

Negative comments were fairly specific, reflecting personal taste in respect to format, background music, the John Walters slot and the parrot motif. However, some more fundamental problems were raised:

- It was felt that many people who live on a basic state pension would not be able to afford the activities shown
- The programmes were seen as primarily for fit and healthy older
- Ethnic minority people were not well-represented in the series
- The use of "super-achievers" - older people who do extraordinary things like competing in triathlons - disaffected some people, who felt that these people were not representative of Third Agers in general
- While the majority were not aware of any patronising tone or material, a few people did feel that this was evident and some were definitely irritated

However, these negative comments have to be put into perspective. No series is going to be universally liked and it should be remembered that the great majority of viewers were very positive about the programmes.

### **CHANGES IN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR AFTER WATCHING THE PROGRAMMES**

The key issue in the whole of the research was the impact of the series on the attitudes and behaviour of the viewers. The research evaluated potential changes in respect to:

- attitudes towards ageing in general
- self-image
- activities and lifestyle

### **CHANGES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS AGEING IN GENERAL**

The evidence from all the different research approaches suggests that the Third Age series was very effective in challenging the dominant, negative image of old age. In the TOPS survey, nearly a quarter of the people who watched the programmes said that their views of later life had changed and that saw later life in much more positive terms. The before and

after research using the in-depth panel provides even more convincing evidence, in that attitudinal change after watching the programmes was documented independently of what people said about themselves. Specifically, people began to describe old age in much more positive terms and fewer negative descriptors were used. The underlying message of the programmes was well-understood and appreciated by viewers. Changes in attitudes at a general level can be discerned in a much more positive outlook, specifically:

- age itself is not a barrier
- older people can make a positive contribution to society
- the Third Age is not the end of the line, but a time of opportunity
- it is up to the individual to face up to the challenge of ageing and to determine their own life

### **CHANGES IN SELF IMAGE**

As well as changes in people's ideas about later life in general, the research looked at the how people see themselves and the impact that the series had on the way they viewed their life and circumstances. In this respect, the Third Age series had to prompt people to look at their lives critically, to raise consciousness about their own potential and to explore opportunities for doing new things. The research suggests that after watching the programmes, people began to evaluate their lives more in terms of the criteria outlined by the series. Their hopes and plans for the future also changed to include an emphasis on a more active lifestyle. After watching the series, people also tended to have developed a more positive attitude towards their own ageing and seeing the opportunities that the Third Age offers.

### **CHANGES IN LIFESTYLE AND PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY**

The research also looked at whether Third Agers changed their behaviour or used their time differently after watching the series. The results of the in-depth research indicates that over half the panel said they were definitely or possibly going to do something. Indeed, five of the 18 people on the panel had already taken up some new activity since watching the programmes. People had begun to look critically at their lives and a majority of the in-depth panel wanted to see change in their lives. The quantitative data supports these results, with a quarter of the TOPS people who watched the series saying they would do something as a result of the Third Age programmes. The kinds of new activities mentioned by viewers were very varied, ranging from keep-fit and dancing to night school classes. The impact was not just in terms of new activities. For example, some people had been influenced by the idea of making a "living will" and had decided to make one out themselves.

## THE POTENTIAL OF EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN EFFECTING PERSONAL CHANGE

While a degree of caution has to be exercised in making these conclusions, because of certain practical limitations of the research, this report has provided strong evidence that the Third Age series has had a significant effect on it's audience. We know that:

- people said that they have changed their ideas about later life
- this change has been monitored independently of what they say
- people have changed their patterns of behaviour
- there is an increased potential for people to take up new activities and lead a more active life

Given this, then it should be recognised that educational programmes, such as those in the "Third Age" series, can be a powerful tool in effecting personal change. The potential for influencing the quality of life of the older viewers, by prompting new interests and a more active and healthy lifestyle should not be underestimated.

### AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While attitudinal and behavioural changes have been shown, what we are less certain about is the potential impact of this kind of series and the process by which attitudinal and behavioural change is facilitated. In particular, we need to know more about the mechanism by which people accommodate media images and ideas within their everyday understandings and attitudes. These represent potentially very fruitful areas of further research that would provide strategic information for making future programmes even more effective.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

1993 was the European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between the Generations. As part of this, the BBC broadcasted a series of ten, 30-minute programmes called the "Third Age", with the aim of raising awareness of issues relating to ageing and old age and to promote a more positive image of older people within society.

BBC Education, who produced the series, commissioned the Institute of Human Ageing to provide an independent evaluation of the series. One aim of this research was to provide feedback on viewers' attitudes towards programme format and content. However, a more fundamental, and certainly more challenging aim from a research point of view, was to look at the impact of the series on the attitudes of viewers. Did the message of the series - that later life can be a positive experience - have any effect on the way people think about themselves and older people in general, and did this in turn lead to a more active lifestyle amongst older viewers?

The results of this research are of interest on several counts. First of all, the older members of society are relatively under-represented in terms of special interest programmes. Indeed, most programmes that deal with old age issues usually focus on the problems facing very frail or dependent elderly people. A considerable number of these have been transmitted in series such as Panorama, Cutting Edge and World in Action in recent years. While this emphasis on social problems is important, it in no way reflects the experience of the vast number of older people in society, most of whom are fit and active. However, as a society, we have very low expectations of "old age" and this can be reflected in the lifestyles of older people. Many older people, because of social constraints, the lack of opportunity, lack of resources and information and their own motivation and self-confidence, may be leading a life that is less than fulfilling. If the medium of television is able to address some of these problems, then its potential for enhancing the quality of life of a large section of the population may be considerable. Finally, the research is of considerable interest from an academic, "gerontological" perspective. Research which examines the link between social attitudes, self-image, behaviour and lifestyle, and the role of television in shaping these, will give us a greater insight into the ageing process in a society dominated by telecommunications and the mass media.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 A multi-method approach

The methodologies adopted in the research were determined by several considerations. Firstly, there was a need for detailed insight into the ways that the Third Age programmes might influence people's attitudes and behaviour. Secondly, sufficient data was required to provide us with some idea of the generalisability of results and the extent to which the programmes might influence behaviour within the target audience. Thirdly, it was felt that no single data source would be sufficient in itself to answer all our questions with confidence. In view of these considerations, a multi-method approach was adopted that included a range of instruments aimed at accessing both qualitative and quantitative data. This is usually referred to as the "triangulation" approach, because the different data sets and analyses can be used to cross-validate each other in order to increase confidence in any results or conclusions. The specific methods briefly described below. Detailed descriptions of the methodology can be found in the relevant sections of the report. The appendix contains all the instruments used in the research.

### 2.2 In-depth panel

A panel of 22 older people was set up with the intention of interviewing them before, during and after the Third Age series. The "before" interviews were undertaken in the two weeks prior to transmission of the first programme and provide baseline data on participants' personalities, lifestyles, attitudes and quality of life. The "during" interviews were completed mid-series and the third interview was completed two weeks after final transmission. One potential problem associated with this approach is the possibility of "sensitising" the panel members to the aims and objectives of the series. Thus, the other research instruments provide an important validation check to either support or contradict results from the in-depth panel.

### 2.3 Programme evaluation

In addition to the interviews, panel members filled in detailed evaluation forms for each programme that they watched. This comprised four open-response questions relating to content of programme, likes, dislikes and any new ideas provoked by the programme.

### 2.4 TOPS questionnaire

Questionnaires were included in the TOPS booklet to coincide with weeks 7 and 10 of the Third Age series. The questions that have been included were considerably more detailed than originally anticipated and provided a very rich source of quantitative and qualitative information. Questions were included on viewing behaviour, evaluations of the programmes in general and the impact of the series on behaviour and attitudes towards ageing. One slight

problem occurred with the TOPS questionnaire. The TOPS panel/committee required us to change the wording of the question on images of old age in the second questionnaire. The question eventually referred to **images of old age on TV** rather than images in general. A further limitation was the fairly small sample (about 50) of TOPS people who actually watched any of the programmes. However, the strength of the TOPS panels is that they would not be sensitised to the series and are representative of the viewing public as a whole.

### 3. OUTLINE OF THE "THIRD AGE" SERIES

#### 3.1 Background

The "Third Age" series comprised 10 programmes transmitted between October 21st and December 23rd 1993, on BBC2 at 2.00 pm on Thursdays. The series succeeded others for older viewers, such as "Prime Time", but was to be of a very different character, both in terms of its "message" and format. The BBC also produced a free magazine to accompany the series, with financial support from the European Commission as part of the European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between the generations.

The title "The Third Age" refers to the book "A fresh map of Life" by Peter Laslett. The Third Age is seen as that time of life after a person's main career or job has finished and children have left home and before the "Fourth Age", the time of increasing frailty, dependence and finally death. Broadly speaking this is the years between ages 50 and 75, which now accounts for about 13 million people in Britain. Unlike the common social images of old age, the vast majority of these people are fit, active and independent.

#### 3.2 Key aims of the series

The series aimed to raise awareness of issues relating to ageing and later life and, in particular, to promote a more positive image of older people. The target audience was people aged over 50 years, but could appeal to people of all ages. There were four main objectives:

- to challenge the generally negative images and stereotypes of old age
- to show that the "Third Age" can be surprising, adventurous, and rich in diversity
- to give insights into how people in the Third Age are changing their lives or responding to change
- to offer role models and to inspire people to take up new activities such as education, work or leisure opportunities

The specific content of the programmes was very varied, drawing primarily on the experiences of ordinary people and told in their own words. However, the programmes did have identifiable themes:

**Lifestyle:** the leisure activities enjoyed by older people

**Relationships:** how relationships change and develop with age and how older people can develop new relationships

**Causes:** how older people can use their experience and time to fight for causes or do

voluntary work

**The inner person:** how older people can develop a sense of well-being and find peace of mind or a new philosophy on life

### 3.3 Presentation

The series has a popular tone that is more "tabloid than broadsheet" and is faster paced than is normally expected in programmes "of this type". The series has a multi-layered look with contrasting features about people linked by archival material and specially devised material, such as "think pieces" by well-known characters. A regular feature was a slot by John Walters, who provided an "off-beat" perspective on the issues covered in each programmes.

The tone of the programmes is argumentative and a little subversive, preferring the maverick and the surprising to the expected and the bland. Thus the tone of the programmes was in keeping with the aim of challenging conventional assumptions and attitudes towards the Third Age. An important objective for the series is to be free of patronising voices or assumptions about older people.

A key aspect of the programmes is that they have no voice over or presenter. In this sense the items featured in the programmes have to "speak for themselves" in terms of conveying the key message(s) to the viewer.

### 3.4 Summary of programmes

#### 3.4.1 Living it up

The Third Age is a time that offers an opportunity to seek pleasure and enjoy oneself after a lifetime of work. The programme looks at various ways that people in the Third Age enjoy themselves and make the most of their life. In particular, the programmes looks at how older people have taken up new activities and hobbies, often confounding the usual expectations about later life. This includes a dance act called "The Cameo Girls" who dance the cancan, an 87 year old woman who has taken-up stained glass making and a man in his eighties, who enjoys "hashing", a kind of cross-country paper chase.

#### 3.4.2 Singles

Many people in the Third Age are single, either through divorce or death of a partner. This programme looked at how different people cope with the single life, ranging from a woman who boasted several male companions and an interest in Country and Western dancing, to a priest who has "come out" as a gay man, since the death of his wife after 30 years of marriage. The

negative side of being alone was also covered and included an item on how Third Agers can find new relationships through a dating agency.

### **3.4.3 Life is for living**

The programme challenges the idea that when people reach a certain age they should become old and behave elderly, rather than carrying on with the enthusiasms that life provides. This includes features on the actor Sam Wannamaker who has worked on the project to restore the Globe Theatre in London. The jazz singer George Melly talks about how he intends to keep rocking till he drops. Also featured is the "Hen Co-op", a group of women who have published a book on getting the most out of life.

### **3.4.4 Something completely different**

The Third Age is a time when many people feel that they have a chance to change their lives. Children have left home, the mortgage is paid-off and freedom beckons. The programme includes Buster Merryfield who has become a successful actor after 40 years as a bank manager. Other people featured are a woman who has built up a successful business, a woman who competes in triathlons and a man who has become a children's entertainer.

### **3.4.5 Ploughing back**

The Third Age can be a time to "plough-back" the skills and knowledge cultivated over the years, for the benefit of others and for your own sense of well-being. This programme includes features on the "greasy gang" of retired men who have restored a steam engine at a tin-mine which is now open to visitors and a woman who is using her social work skills in Eastern Europe.

### **3.4.6 Home is where the heart is**

The Third Age can be a time where people can try out new places in which to live and experiment with new styles of living. It is also a time when people have to make a decision over whether to move or stay put. The programme looked at the many different approaches to making one's home in the Third Age and the way older people can be adventurous in their choices, such as living on a houseboat or a motorhome.

### **3.4.7 Doctor Feelgood**

The series in general examined what older people are doing. This programme explored the "inner person" and examined how Third Agers can achieve a sense of well-being. Examples of this included how an ex-POW has struggled to escape from the influences of his wartime experiences and how people come to terms with death and mortality.

### 3.4.8 Rebels with a cause

The Third Age is a period when people can devote their energy, experience and time to fighting for causes. The programme included David Bellamy, who at 60, remains an energetic campaigner on green issues. Other items included "Surfers against Sewage", who were campaigning for cleaner water off Cornwall, and a Grandparents organisation who were seeking rights for grandparents to have access to grandchildren.

### 3.4.9 Couples

It is commonly assumed that relationships lose their romance amid the habits and routines with time. The programme shows how long-married couples refreshed their marriages and included contributions from couples talking about the lighter and serious sides of marriage, habits, sex-life, and living arrangements.

### 3.4.10 Memories

This programme looked at the importance of memories in the sense of well-being amongst older people. The programme looks at how wartime memories still evoke a sense of togetherness that appear lacking nowadays. The programme also explore the idea of oral history for keeping important traditions alive.

## 4. IN-DEPTH PANEL RESEARCH

### 4.1 Introduction

The information presented in this section is drawn from in-depth interviews conducted with a panel of 22 older viewers. Panellists were recruited in various locations in North West of England and were asked to watch at least three of the programmes from the Third Age series. The panel was set up in order to get access to a reasonable number of people who had seen programmes from the series, while at the same time ensuring that they watched the programmes in the context of their everyday lives. Three in-depth interviews were undertaken: before the series was transmitted; midway through the series; after transmission of the final programme.

### 4.2 Methodology

#### 4.2.1 The panel

The panel comprised 22 interviewees for the first in-depth interview. One person dropped out after the first stage, leaving 21 people for the second interview. Initial interviews lasted between forty five minutes and 2 hours, with a mean of 1 hour and took place between 13th and 20th October 1993, immediately prior to the transmission of the first programme. The second interviews lasted about 1 hour and took place between 21st November and 4th December. The third interviews lasted approximately 1 hour, ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes and took place in early January 1994, two weeks after transmission of the last programme. Eighteen people were interviewed at this third stage.

#### 4.2.2 Aim of the interviews

The "before-during-after" design of the in-depth research was intended to chart any changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the panel members after watching programmes from the Third Age series.

**Interview 1** was undertaken to provide baseline information on panellists' lifestyles, self-images, attitudes towards old age in general, psychological well-being, attitudes towards TV; the role and use of TV in their everyday lives and the portrayal of older people on TV.

**Interview 2** was aimed at eliciting panellists' attitudes towards the Third Age series in general. This focused on whether they thought it was aimed at them, how much they liked it, what the message of the series was and what they were understanding. These interviews were also aimed at picking up any initial changes in attitudes and behaviour since the initial interview.

**Interview 3** repeated many of the measures and questions from the previous two interviews. These were aimed at charting changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of watching the programmes and to see whether attitudes towards the programmes themselves had changed over the duration of the series.



#### 4.2.3 Construction of the panel

Obviously, in a group of 22 people it was not possible to have a truly scientific sample. However, we tried to make the panel as representative as possible of different groups within the older population. The people on the panel can be broken down as follows:

<b>Location:</b>	9 Liverpool, 6 Runcorn, 5 East Lancashire, 2 Bolton
<b>Sex:</b>	14 female, 8 males
<b>Age:</b>	6 people 55-64, 14 people 65-74, 2 people 75-81
<b>Marital status:</b>	14 people married, 7 widowed, 1 divorced
<b>Household:</b>	7 people living alone, 14 living with partner, 1 living with child
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	17 white, 1 African British, 2 Indian, 1 Afro-Caribbean, 1 Ghanaian
<b>Employment:</b>	17 retired, 2 full-time employed, 2 part-time employed, 1 housewife
<b>Socio-economic class:</b>	9 people A/B/C1, 13 people C2/D/E
<b>Annual income:</b>	12 people under 5000, 5 people 5000-10000, 3 people 10000-15000, 1 person over 15000, 1 no answer
<b>Educational level:</b>	14 had no qualifications, 5 with school certificate, 1 with O'levels, 1 with A'levels, 1 with degree
<b>Morale:</b>	6 people with low morale, 16 average/high morale
<b>Health:</b>	14 people said that they had some kind of problem with their health and 8 said that they had none. Problems included: arthritis, angina, sinus problems, lung tumour. 8 people said that their health problems prevented them from doing things, particularly in respect to walking, bending and manipulating.

As already mentioned, four people had dropped out of the original panel of 22 people by stage three of the interviewing. The two Asian participants dropped out due to problems of comprehension and relevance. One white woman dropped out due to admission to hospital. One white woman decided not to participate for personal reasons. It is likely that this lady was suffering from depression at the time. The loss of only four people from the original panel indicates a very high completion rate and does not compromise confidence in the results of this part of the research.

#### 4.2.4 Watching the programmes

The people in the panel were requested to watch a minimum of three of the programmes. However, on average, 10 people watched each of the programmes. The programme watched by the least number of people was programme number 9 "Couples" with six people watching and the most watched was the first one, "Ploughing Back" with 17 viewers. On an individual basis, there was a wide variation between people, ranging from one person who hated the programmes and watched only two, to several who watched all ten.

#### 4.3 The role of television in people's lives

##### 4.3.1 How important is television to people?

Five people in the original panel of 22 people said that TV was not important in their lives, but for the majority, TV fulfilled important roles in their life, including: relaxing, passing time, entertaining, education and information. Some people saw TV as "company", combating loneliness, and as a way of keeping in touch with what is going on in the world. Only one person saw TV as stimulating.

People were asked whether they watched TV a lot, an average amount, or not so much, with most people feeling they were average (11 people). Everybody did watch TV. On average people watched 27 hours of TV per week, with a range of 12 hours to 63 hours. Generally speaking perceived time and actual time were correlated.

##### 4.3.2 What did people like about television?

The main things that people liked about TV was that it was relaxing, distracting from worries, filling in time and allowed the, to "compete" in a non-threatening way, say through quizzes. What people don't like by far is violence, crime, murder, sex, children's presenters, politicians. Some people feel that TV spoils conversation and homelife and that children see too much of it.

Most people (19) said that they were reasonably selective in their viewing, with only 3 people saying they watched anything that was on. In general, people concentrate on TV and don't do other activities at the same time. Everybody watches TV in the evening, and a majority (15) said that they also watch in the afternoons. Almost half watch morning TV.

Preferred programmes included soaps, documentaries, news, sports. What people didn't like was crime, vulgarity, children's and "yoof" TV. Obviously personal tastes are very heterogeneous.

Nine people said that they had seen programmes aimed at an older age group. These were not programmes such as Prime Time, but programmes which included older people or characters, such as Coronation Street, One Foot in the Grave, Come Dancing and the Golden Girls.

### 4.3.3 Images of old age on TV

People were asked to name and describe an older person or character they had seen on TV. The key people mentioned were:

**Hyacinth Bucket** was described as: bossy, houseproud, bubbly and fantastic, terrific personality, posh, snobbish, quick and giving husband a bad time, looking good for her age

**Victor Meldrew** was described as: argumentative, bombastic, overbearing, sarcastic, acerbic, opinionated, didactic and living in the past

**Tom in Waiting for God** was described as: caring elderly person, down to earth and true to life

**Percy Sugden** was described as: meddling, tries to help, overbearing and opinionated

Others mentioned were Rita Fairclough, Thora Hird, Characters in Emmerdale, Trevor Macdonald, Bill Maynard, David Attenborough, Cilla Black, Steptoe and Bob Monkhouse.

When asked about the verisimilitude of characters and people, most participants said that they were true to life. It should be pointed out that the dominant TV images were generally negative in tone.

Participants were asked about how older people were typically portrayed on TV. Mainly they were perceived to be: over the top, silly, slow and confused, stupid, senile, intolerant. Some people felt that older people were misrepresented on TV and should be shown in a more positive way as cheerful and active.

## 4.4 Panel's evaluation of the Third Age Series

### 4.4.1 General impressions of the Third Age Series

The key message of the programmes, as interpreted by the panel, was that older people should try to make the most out of their lives. For example:

"The series aimed at getting people to help themselves and take an interest in things and make more of the life they have got left"

"It said that there is plenty to do with life. You have just got to go out and get on with it. There are all sorts of things to do and people to meet. Don't give up on yourself even if you are on your own"

People were asked to describe the series in general, as if they were describing it to another person. The way the series was described is summarised as follows:

**Age-related:** for retirement-age people  
for 50+ people

**Activities:** interesting things people can do with their lives  
finding new activities  
showing older people's interests  
to stimulate older people into new activities

**Well-being:** to keep your energy going to stay healthy  
about what you can do to keep yourself younger  
how not to get under each other's feet  
about overcoming fear about getting old  
to keep your mind busy, to make yourself happy  
how to cope with ageing  
doing new things  
your life depends on you  
don't get despondent  
when you are old - go for it

**Against age-  
stereotypes:** you don't have to act old  
telling you you have a lot of life left  
life doesn't finish, its another stage  
about getting out and about, not sitting at home  
being old doesn't mean staying at home  
never too old to do things  
its a new beginning  
enjoy your old age  
age is not important - it is how you feel  
you have a lot to offer

A more detailed analysis of the ways individual programmes were interpreted is given in Section 5.

#### 4.4.2 Did people like the series?

In general people liked the programmes, with the majority saying that they "liked them a lot" (Table 4.1). The following was a typical evaluation:

"I liked it a lot, because it's about real people, telling their life stories. I think truth is always better than fiction"

Table 4.1 Did people like the series?

	Interview 2	Interview 3
Liked a lot	9	10
Liked a little	7	6
Neither	1	1
Disliked a little	0	0
Disliked a lot	2	1
n=	19	18

Table 4.2 Words used to describe the programmes

	Interview 1	Interview 2
interesting	15	16
boring	4	1
enjoyable	14	16
educational	14	14
covered wide range of issues	16	16
made me think more about life	10	9
gave me ideas	9	12
good quality programmes	17	16
difficult to understand	4	1
left me wanting to see more	10	10
try to watch every programme	13	14
worked well as a series	13	15
like to see another series	14	16
like to see older people enjoying selves	17	18
like to see people busy and active	18	18
people were typical of age group	8	11
programmes aimed at older people are a good idea	17	14
n =	19	18

#### 4.4.3 Statements about the series

In order to get views about the programme, panellists were asked to complete a checklist of words to describe the series. Panellists were asked to tick any word that they felt was an appropriate description of the programmes. The results for both interview 2 & 3 are summarised in Table 4.2.

In general, people were very positive about the series. Very few people using the negative descriptors of "boring" and "difficult to understand" and words such as "interesting" and "enjoyable" being used by the great majority of people. An interesting feature is that the series was rated more positively in interview three than in interview 2. This may indicate that the programmes worked well as a series, engaging people's interest and leading to a

more positive view. For example:

"I wasn't that keen on them to start with, but on the whole I quite liked the programmes. They were reasonably enjoyable and they got much better as they went on"

#### 4.4.4 Evaluation of programme quality

In general people felt the programmes to be of a uniformly high quality.

**Pace:** Pace is good in general. Some people felt it was somewhat bitty and jumpy. A half hour was enough

**Format:** Format seem to be well-accepted. Nobody wanted a voice-over or presenter. Attitudes to the parrot motif were varied. People liked the music

**Information level:** In general it was OK. Some people wanted more local, specific information about how to get involved in things in their area. Some people felt that the information was not practical for the majority of the elderly. The activities were too specific to people's interests or the people were too exceptional

**Presentation:** In general it was not seen to be patronising, although a minority of people felt that it was condescending and patronising. John Walters got a very mixed response. Some people liked the humour, others felt he was very condescending. A lot of people were unable to relate his contribution to the rest of the programme, so that it seemed incongruous

**Content:** People felt that programmes were interesting, good, varied and enjoyable. people liked having one programme per week on a different content area. They liked the insight into people's everyday life

**Tone:** In general thought that the series was broadening their attitudes and options, giving them ideas. It didn't tell people things, it just showed things

#### 4.4.5 What things stuck in people's minds

A number of things were mentioned as being memorable during the series. It is likely that these may be significant in shaping peoples attitudes and choice of subsequent behaviour. There are two underlying causes of things being memorable within the series:

**Exceptionality:** People were seeing exceptional people doing exceptional things:

- children's entertainer
- woman who built business up
- triathlon woman
- the "hasher"

- the paper chase
- gay vicar

**Interesting activities:** People identified with specific activities they have done themselves or would like to do, or find interesting:

- stained glass
- Cornish tin-mine renovation
- dancing couple in garden
- Cameo group
- grandparents with the children
- lady journalist

#### 4.4.6 Targeting of programmes

The Third Age programmes were aimed at a wide audience of people aged above the age of 50. If the series was to be effective in shaping opinion and changing behaviour, then the question of whether people identified with the programmes is clearly important. Panellists were asked whether they felt the programmes were aimed at people like them? The results are given in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Were the programmes aimed at people like you

	Interview 2	Interview 3
yes, definitely	12	6
yes, possibly	3	7
no	6	5
n=	21	18

In general, identification was not on the basis of age-group. The people who felt that the programmes were not aimed at them mentioned things like cultural differences, or that the programmes were aimed at people who "can't think for themselves" or "people with money".

#### 4.4.7 Possible improvements for the future

The things mentioned by people depended on the way they engaged with the programmes:

**Entertainment:** stop programmes for older people altogether; look at the "reality" of life of older people



**Information:** like to see things about other countries; what older people in other cultures do

**Ideas for doing things:** more things based in the home; more down to earth things; things that can be done locally; things that won't cost much; more practical advice; voluntary work

**Content areas people would like to see in another series:** educational courses; flower arranging; cookery; holidays; care for others; health and welfare

## 4.5 Changing attitudes and behaviour

### 4.5.1 The potential for changing people's attitudes and behaviour

The question of how television can change the way people think and behave is a major focus of attention within media research. Despite this attention, it is a question for which we have few convincing answers. For example, while there is a widespread belief that the violence portrayed on television leads people to commit violent acts themselves, there is very little empirical evidence to support this, let alone convincing theories and models as to how this process could operate.

This issue is of central importance to the present evaluation of the Third Age series. Given its underlying evangelical message and mission - to approach later life more positively and to develop a fulfilling lifestyle - then the success of the programmes depends on the extent to which they do affect viewer's attitudes and behaviour. This is a very ambitious objective and is a testament to the commitment of the BBC's Continuing Education Department that they have commissioned independent research to assess the impact of the series.

The before and after design of the in-depth panel study has meant that we have been able to closely chart any possible effects of the programmes. The idiographic, qualitative approach also means that measurement is very sensitive to subtle changes that would often be overlooked by quantitative techniques such as scaling. It is also important to emphasise that the panel study was approached naturalistically. While some degree of artificialness is inherent in any research, it was essential that the process of watching the Third Age programmes was embedded within the everyday lives of the participants. This will allow us to make at least some claims about the potential effectiveness of the programmes within people's everyday lives.

A number of potential impact areas were identified:

- Have people learned anything new about later life?
- Have people changed the way they think about life in the later years?
- Have people changed the way in which they see themselves?
- Have people changed their behaviour?

A number of open-ended questions were devised to measure a range changes within these three areas.

#### 4.5.2 Have people learned anything new about later life?

We asked people whether they felt they had learned anything from watching the programmes. Table 4.4 indicates that a large majority of the sample answered in the affirmative, with about a third saying they had learned a lot. The data for the final sample of 18 people is especially convincing, with only four people saying that they had not learned anything from the programmes.

Table 4.4 Have people learned anything new about later life?

	Interview 2	Interview 3
yes, a lot	6	6
yes, a little	7	8
no	8	4
n=	21	18

The results here suggest that the programmes were not simply going over what people knew already, but there were issues raised which had not been thought of or articulated by them. The programmes opened people's eyes to the range of activities that older people are involved in. Examples of what people mentioned are:

"Age is limiting, but it is not the be all and end all of things. You have to have the right attitude in life"

"Life is there to take. Get out and meet people and do as much as you can afford"

A minority of four who said that they didn't learn anything, mentioned things

"I already knew that older people were doing these sorts of things"

"It wasn't based on the reality of the majority"

"I didn't think education was the intention - rather it was to point you in different directions"

### 4.5.3 Have people changed the way they think about later life?

We asked people whether the programmes had changed the way people thought about life in later years. Responses are summarised in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Changing the way you think about later life

	Interview 2	Interview 3
yes, a lot	4	5
yes, a little	4	5
no	13	8
n=	21	18

To assess attitudinal change it was important to look at the general images that people hold about old age. The first and third interviews contained two questions on this issue. Firstly, people were asked "tell me in your own words what comes into your mind when you think about an older person?". Particular attention was given to the positive and negative images of old age and responses to this question were categorised into:

- those people who did have something positive to say about older people
- those people whose images were totally negative

Table 4.6 Positive and negative images of old age

	Interview 1	Interview 3
Something positive	6	10
Wholly negative	12	8
n=	18	18

Table 4.6 shows that, initially, a large majority of the panel held wholly negative images of older people. Lots of negative words and phrases were used such as: in poor health, disabled, tired, slow, lonely, sorry for themselves, with declining facilities, financially worse-off, marginalised, depressed, afraid, forgetful, irritable, suspicious. One person said "pills and a "coffin" came into their minds. There were one or two people who held more positive images, such as: wise, rich life experiences, interested and active.

In the third interview this picture had changed considerably, with the majority now mentioning positive attributes in their description of older people. Individually, six people

had gone from "wholly negative" to "something positive", while two people had moved in the opposite way. For example, one lady in Liverpool had originally described older people in terms of:

"...loose teeth, poor sight, hearing and mobility, hair loss, and grumpiness"

After watching the programmes she now used the following words:

"...active, young-minded, looking for something to do and having friends"

A second approach to understanding social images of old age was to provide participants with a predefined list of 40 words to describe older people. Participants were free to choose whatever words they felt were appropriate descriptors. The checklist was generated by asking individuals outside the study to provide a list of descriptors. The final list was evenly balanced between positive, negative and neutral descriptors. This checklist was administered in interview 1 and followed up in interview 3.

Table 4.7 Checklist of words used to describe older people

	Interview 1	Interview 3
Intelligent	4	5
Family-oriented	7	5
Lonely	12	9
Useful	0	9
Widowed	8	7
Faded	6	4
Demanding	7	4
Deaf	7	6
Grey-haired	10	6
Caring	2	5
Dependent	5	3
Experienced	6	6
Awkward	8	6
Retired	5	7
Sociable	3	4
Generous	4	6
Wrinkled	7	5
Stay-at-home	9	2
Intolerant	4	6
Tired	7	5
Talkative	6	4
Living in the past	10	9
Skilled	3	3
Grandparents	8	5
Frail	6	4
Sprightly	3	7
Hard-up	5	6
Confused	6	3
Helpful	2	7

	Interview 1	Interview 3
In poor health	5	5
Living alone	6	6
Patient	2	4
Cantankerous	7	4
Contented	4	6
Slow	4	2
Wise	6	7
Unhappy	1	2
Stuck in a rut	6	3
Free to do as they like	7	5
Independent	3	5
n =	18	14
x =	12.28	14.5

Table 4.7 summarises the words chosen by participants. In the initial interview, images were predominantly negative and the most commonly used words were: lonely, widowed, grey-haired, awkward, living in past, grandparents, stay-at-home. However, there were several differences between interviews one and three, indicating a much more positive perspective on later life. Key changes were:

- There was a decrease in the number of people who associate old age with loneliness
- Initially, no-one used the term "useful" to describe older people, whereas five did so in the third interview
- More people used the terms caring, sprightly, helpful
- Fewer people described older people as demanding, grey-haired, cantankerous, stuck in a rut
- There was a large decrease in the number of people who used the term "stay-at-home" to describe older people

Also during the third interview, four people now said that they could not use the checklist because they now felt that older people were a more heterogeneous group than they had formerly thought and that generic terms were inappropriate. This indicates a much more sophisticated and less stereotyped view of old age was held by some viewers after watching the Third Age series. This also makes the swing to the use of more positive checklist descriptors even more significant, as there are fewer people who completed the checklist in interview 3.

We also looked at the number of words used from the checklist. During the first interview, the mean number of words used by people was 12. In the third interview this had increased to 15. This again indicates a possible increase in the complexity of people's mental representations of old age as they were now having to use more words to cover the range of characteristics now associated with older people. It is important to stress that these results are not self-evaluations of whether people think that their images of old age have changed. Rather they are independently documented changes, of which they will be most probably be unaware.

In the final interview we asked panel members how they thought other older people spent their time. Despite the changes in the imagery of later life, people still seemed to see older people as home-oriented and tied into domestic routines. However, there is awareness that some older people are very active. This may reflect a belief that many of the people featured in the programmes were exceptional rather than typical older people.

#### **4.5.4 Have people changed the way in which they see themselves?**

##### **4.5.4.1 Dimensions of self-image**

The issue of self-image is an important one in evaluating the impact of the Third Age series. For attitudinal and behavioural change to happen, then the underlying messages of the programmes and the general representation of old age has to be applied to how people view their own selves and their own situations.

##### **4.5.4.2 People's descriptions of themselves**

In general, people describe themselves in very positive ways, whatever their age, and this was borne out in people's responses to asking them to describe themselves in the initial interview. People stressed the helpful side of their natures and that they are friendly, sociable and good-natured. One or two stressed their intellectual capacities. Only one person mentioned that they had poor health. One or two said that they had strong views on things. Only two described themselves in entirely in negative terms, such as "unhappy and lonely" and "frustrated and a time waster". The follow-up interview did not indicate any real changes in these self-evaluations after watching the series. In general, people were still very positive and should be seen as independent of ageing. An important point is that most people did not refer to their age when describing themselves in either the initial or third interviews. One interesting case, however, is one man whose initial self-evaluation was positive in the initial interview:

"liberal feelings towards life, dislike of bad manners and cruelty to animals, tolerant and happy"

In the follow-up interview, this man now said:

"I am more ambitious in mind than reality. I want to do things, but I don't seem to get round to it"

It appears that this person's self-evaluations have been influenced by the images of active

older people he had seen in the Third Age programmes. He had initially been classified as an "inactive" person, but after watching the series, he had started a language course and was thinking about taking-up calligraphy as a hobby.

Changes in people's self-images after watching the series were suggested by responses to other questions in the before and after interviews. We asked people what their good points were. The follow-up interviews indicated that people were now framing their evaluations in terms of the programmes' message. No-one, when itemising their good points had mentioned keeping young, fit and active in the first interviews. After watching the series, the third interviews elicited responses from four people that were clearly related to the fit and active theme. For example, one woman had originally said that she was "sociable, helpful, generous and understanding. In the third interview she said that she was "energetic, active, with lots of get up and go". Both self-evaluations were positive, but the nature of these had changed.

Similarly, when we look at what people mentioned as their bad points, four people had changed the way they evaluated themselves to reflect the theme of the series. These were a different four people to the ones who had changed their "positive" self-evaluations.

What we have here are some indications that the Third Age programmes had influenced the ways that people think about themselves and evaluate their life and situations. We have to be very careful about how we interpret these results. The open-ended approach is volatile in terms of the responses it will elicit over time with the same person. However, the trend should be taken seriously. Even if self-images have not fundamentally changed, the way these are being expressed and articulated may have changed, which may be a key factor in the construction of the "self". Clearly, further detailed research will be required to uncover the way these processes might operate in relation to external media such as TV.

#### 4.5.4.3 Hopes and plans for the future

In the initial interview we also asked how people perceived their futures. Hopes and plans for the future centred on travelling and holidays, keeping healthy and happy. Some people lived their futures through their children. This kind of vicarious experience can fill apparently empty lives. Reaching milestones, such as age 65, ruby wedding and children marrying are also important to people. Very few people mentioned small goals such as learning a language, sewing, learning the piano and so on. Two people saw no future for themselves, where life was seen as lonely, miserable and being at an end,

In the third interview, people's hopes and plans appeared to include a more active lifestyle. For some people this was expressed as a general intention to be active:

"I want to go on as now, but with more out of house activities"

Other people were more specific and mentioned a range of activities that had not figured in the initial interview, such as sports, bridge, voluntary work, riding, walking. For example:

"I want to see my daughter happily married and spend more time with them. I also want to play more sport and play bridge and see more sport. I want to go to Lords"



One person who linked her ideas very strongly in with an item in "Something Completely Different" said that she wanted to set up her own business and was currently looking for premises. When asked about their ambitions, eight people out of 18 in the third stage gave very specific ideas which seemed to link into the programme, for example, doing a triathlon, going to the theatre and going out to meals.

#### 4.5.4.4 What are the good and bad things about getting older

People were asked to compare themselves with 10 years ago and to identify the key changes in their life. Here people began to emphasise their deteriorating health and their reduced levels of activity. Nine people said that their health had become worse over the years and eight people said that they were less active. People also talked about changes in their life circumstances, such as retirement and widowhood. Some people talked about changes in their personalities, such as becoming more thoughtful, more mature and more tolerant. Only one person felt that they were more active now than 10 years ago. Only two people talked about the visible signs of ageing, such as grey hair and wrinkles. It is interesting that their perceived age changes did not appear to contribute to their general self-image. Most people were able to see good things about getting older when asked, such as less worry; more relaxation, time for self.

There appeared to be a trend towards becoming more philosophical about life - one has achieved one's goals and there is less pressure to achieve and do things. The key thing is having one's health so that life can be enjoyed, at the pace that the person themselves can now determine.

There are bad things, particularly in relation to poor health and what it prevents you from doing things. There is loneliness and the fear of loneliness and a strong feeling of one's own mortality - will I be dead tomorrow? Some people can become very anxious about problems such as crime in the locality.

Panellists were asked specifically to say what they thought were the good things about getting older. This was aimed at determining how positive people's attitudes towards ageing can be. This was not asked in general, but in terms of their own life experiences. The key question here was to see whether the programme influenced people to see old age in a more positive light than previously.

In the initial interviews, of the 18 people who completed all three stages of the panel research, eight people said that there was nothing positive about getting older. In the third interview, this had reduced to five people. In general, the statements they made tended to be about having the freedom to do what you want and make your own decisions. For example:

"I have more time to do things. You can have a busy life. You only have yourself to worry about and you can do what you want"

As well as the good things, people were asked about the bad things associated with getting older. Every panellist mentioned something that was bad. In particular, they were concerned about their own mortality, money worries issues related to poor health - slowing down and not being as fit and active as when they were younger. There was very little

change between the first and third interviews, except that one person responded by saying that they could do the same things as when they were younger.

The next stage was to look at whether people themselves were aware of any changes in their own attitudes towards later life. More than half the people (10 out of 18) in the panel said that their attitudes had changed, with five of them saying that their thinking had changed considerably. For example:

"It was all enlightening. I hadn't thought that there was so much to do. And these projects like rebuilding a theatre aren't necessarily out of reach from older people"

It is interesting to note that all five of the people who had changed their views considerably were healthy with very active lifestyles themselves, but with very negative images of old age in general in the first interview.

#### **4.5.5 Have people changed their behaviour?**

##### **4.5.5.1 The lifestyles of older people**

We began by asking people whether they thought they were an "active person". Eighteen people said that they were active. Clearly, there is considerable subjective interpretation of what constitutes being "active". The four people who said they were inactive said that "they sit around a lot" and feel "lazy" and ascribed this to their age, health or attitudes.

Participants were asked to describe a typical day, covering the timing and kinds of daily activities apart from eating and sleeping. The main morning activities were shopping and housework and to a lesser extent work, smoking, pottering, reading, taking dog out, caring, cooking, bathing, praying, walks, looking after children, visiting relatives, going to church, post office/bank, tending animals, worrying, golf, watching TV.

Afternoon activities were most commonly preparing meals and watching TV, but also included napping, shopping, pottering about, playing cards, walking, clubs/community centres, walking dog, dominoes, work, bridge, hobbies, trips out, voluntary work, visiting, housework, library, swimming, window-shopping, looking after kids, entertaining, pub, gardening, worrying, radio.

In the evening the main activities were watching TV and reading. Other evening activities included work, entertaining, cooking, reading, performing music, puzzles, community centre, pub/club, caring for others, pottering about, visiting, running, knitting, handicrafts, radio, bridge, chatting, watching video, worrying.

##### **4.5.5.2 Changing your lifestyle**

We then asked people if they were likely to do anything as a result of watching the programmes.

Table 4.8 indicates that the majority of people did think that they would do something. Also, the proportion of people who said "yes definitely" had increased by interview three.

Activities mentioned were very varied. For example:

"I am going to start a course at Liverpool University's Department of Continuing Education. I am going to do something on local history"

Table 4.8 Changing your lifestyle

	Interview 2	Interview 3
yes, definitely	4	6
yes, possibly	7	5
no	10	7
n=	21	18

However, a significant proportion of people said that they didn't envisage any change:

"I have my own interests already and they don't need to influence me to change"

An important point is that many of the people who said that they were going to do something already had a lot of activities in their lives. It is interesting to look at the possible impact on less active people. By the end of the third interview, we had built up a sufficient database to use to evaluate each person's everyday life and activities as either an active or inactive lifestyle. This was done on the basis of yesterday diaries and reports of hobbies, interests and activities. On this basis, of our remaining 18 people, 12 people were classified as having an active lifestyle and six as inactive. Inactive people's lives were restricted to everyday tasks of living, with minimal involvement in other activities, such as hobbies or interests.

In the follow-up interviews we asked people whether they had taken up any new pastimes or activities as a result of watching the programmes. Five people said that they had done, such as creative writing, working in a charity shop and enrolling on a continuing education course. While three of these people had been classified as "active" people already, two people who had been classified as "inactive" before the programmes began had taken up new pastimes. In other words the programmes had reached two inactive people and inspired them to do something new.

We also asked panellists whether they were thinking of taking up any new activities, a very high number - 11 of the 18 panellists said that they were. However, thinking about doing something does not necessarily mean that they will actually carry out their intentions. Having said that, the sorts of possible activities were: gardening, walking, rambling, studying a language, voluntary work, night school class, crafts, social clubs, keep fit and dancing. A typical response was:

"Yes I have been thinking quite seriously about going to a dancing school to do bronze and silver medals. I think it is important healthwise to do some activities and I have decided it would be good to have a go"

Taking all this into account, a full 15 of the 18 people have a strong possibility of living a more active later life than previously.

It should be emphasised that the new activities mentioned by the subjects generally did not figure in the series. This indicates that people were understanding the general message of the series and not seeing it simply as a source of specific idea. This process of generalising from the specific items shown in the series and then translating these general principles into their own specific avenues of interest was an essential part of the process of behavioural change.

#### 4.5.5.3 Did people want to see change in their life?

Of the 18 people who completed all stages of the research 10 people said that they would like to see changes in their lives, with the remainder saying they were satisfied with the ways things were. The changes that people would like to see were couched in very general terms and included: to go out more, learn new skills, more social contact. A number of people mentioned things that were basically outside their control, such as: more money, better health, less demands on them as a carer and more respect from the rest of society.

By the third interview, the number of people wanting change in their life had increased to 13, with only five now saying they were satisfied with the way things were. There is a possibility here that the programmes might have unsettled people, making them less satisfied with their present life. It should be remembered here that heightened awareness can be a positive or negative thing. Where people's expectations are raised and where they are powerless to change situations that they perceive to be unsatisfactory, then this may lead to a reduction in their psychological well-being.

#### 4.5.5.4 Barriers to change

An important issue that was explored with the panel members was whether any barriers existed that prevented them from changing their life, if this was something that they desired. In the first interview, nine people out of the 18 who also completed stage three, said that barriers did exist. Most of these related to external constraints such as money, health, family circumstances and caring for a relative. Two people mentioned psychological factors, specifically the lack of motivation.

In the third interview, the number of people who claimed that barriers existed had risen from nine to 14. Two people who had originally said that barriers existed now claimed that they did not exist. Surprisingly, this means that seven of the panel, after watching the programmes, now claimed that barriers existed to changing their life.

A further surprising result was that the barriers mentioned by these people were different to the external factors emphasised in the initial interview. Five people mentioned psychological factors:

"It's the way I am. I'm stuck here. I lack the motivation to do anything"

The other factor, mentioned by two people, was the perceived lack of things to do in the

local area:

"There's not enough entertainment around where I live", the implication being that were there more things around, this person would do more

This issue of barriers to change is of considerable psychological interest, as it provides some insight into the way people work with ideas gained from the media and how they become part of that person's construction of their own situations as an older person. It is difficult to interpret these results without more detailed research. However, this is an important area and deserves some tentative explanation. It is important to make the point that TV images and messages are not simply absorbed and regurgitated by viewers. Rather, they feed into a complex and dynamic process of attitude formation and the construction of lay theories about old age and ageing. The images and information from the programmes are interpreted, evaluated and used to make sense of everyday reality.

The construction of these new sorts of barriers after watching the programmes may thus be explained in two ways:

- Firstly, a more sophisticated understanding of old age may have led to a greater insight into the psychological constraints that operate on older people
- Secondly, a heightened awareness of their own relative inactivity compared to the TV images resulted in a need to justify their lack of action

#### 4.6 Conclusion

From the results of the in-depth panel study, there are strong indications that the programmes had a significant impact on older people's attitudes, knowledge base and actual and potential behaviour. It is possible to say that the programmes had influenced the way the panellists viewed themselves and old age in general. This more positive outlook reflected the message of the programmes "to make the most of your life". This in turn seems to have prompted them to think about changing their lifestyles. Certainly, we can claim that people had taken up new activities as a result of watching the programmes.

It is less easy to be conclusive about the exact processes by which this operates. One could suggest that the programmes offered an external source of information about old age and images of older people's lifestyles. This has two potential areas of impact. Firstly, people would watch the programmes and compare themselves and their life situation with what they saw, leading the person to develop new ideas and goals. Secondly, the programmes provided a more general model of what life could be like, offering a challenging theory about old age, which undermined the common assumptions about old age. The combined effect is to jolt people into doing something. However, it is clear that further research is needed in this area if we are to fully understand the processes that lead to attitude and behaviour change in response to television.

## 5. IN-DEPTH EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES

### 5.1 Introduction

Participants in the in-depth panel were asked to evaluate each individual programme. Their responses were rated on a five-point scale from "liked a lot" to "disliked a lot" and are summarised in Table 5.1. The clear indication is that majority of people rated the programmes as "liked a lot". The exception is "Singles" where there was a mixed response, with more people saying they disliked it than any other single programme.

The participants in the in-depth panel were asked to fill-in a short, single sheet questionnaire after any of the Third Age programmes that they watched. The questionnaire consisted of four questions:

- What was the programme about?
- What you liked about it?
- What you disliked about it?
- What new ideas has it brought to your attention?

Participants wrote down their thoughts in their own words on the sheets, providing a very rich data set on their immediate impressions of the individual programmes. While there is always some difficulty in this approach because of the different levels of skills in literacy and expression, the data generated was generally of high quality. This was analysed through a process of content analysis in order to reduce it to a more limited and manageable set of meanings/categories, while maintaining the semantic integrity of the original qualitative data. The results for each of the individual programmes is given in turn below.

### 5.2 Ploughing back

The programme had a strong message about the contribution that older people can still make to society after retirement. The programme was interpreted in terms of:

"What can be achieved by older people"

"Older people doing something constructive with their life"

"Never too old to go out and find new interests"

"New ideas and interests for retired people who are mentally and physically active"

"Showed that elderly people with skills and knowledge can still make a contribution to society today"

Table 5.1 In-depth panel evaluation of programmes

	Liked a lot	Liked a little	Neither	Disliked a little	Disliked a lot
Ploughing back	10	1	2	1	1
Something completely different	8	2	1	1	0
Living it up	6	3	1	1	1
Singles	3	5	1	5	0
Life is for living	5	3	1	2	0
Home is where the heart is	5	2	0	0	1
Doctor feel good	5	2	1	1	0
Couples	7	1	1	0	1
Rebels with a cause	6	3	1	0	0
Memories	9	1	0	0	0

The message of the programme was summarised very well by one of the panellist members:

"Old people are not finished when they retire. They have experience and skills and knowledge which they should continue to use to help others and keep themselves active. Old people can learn new skills and travel to help others now they are no longer tied to family responsibilities. Even if they are just looking after grandchildren, they can pass on their family history and knowledge of the past"

Most of the viewers found a lot to like in the programme. The wide variety of activities covered and seeing older people using their skills and knowledge was very appealing. The positive view of later life was appreciated:

"The third age is a new life and not an ending"

"You can put something back into life"

"Everyone on the projects really seemed to enjoy themselves doing something they could not have done when still working"

"The people portrayed weren't just content to sit back and do nothing after retirement"

The participants mentioned a number of things that they didn't like about the programme, although these were fairly minor, specific complaints. However, a number of people mentioned that the sorts of activities shown would not be accessible to disabled or poor people:

"The programme was selective in its choice of elderly people. There was not mention of the disabled"

"It was for people without money problems and could enjoy those things"

### 5.3 Living it up

The programme was wide ranging in its scope and this was reflected in the things that the panellists said it was about:

"Physical activity is marvellous for those fit enough"

"A group of ladies dancing to entertain retired people"

"It was about older people socialising"

"That age is no barrier to enjoying yourself and that there are various ways in pursuing this object"

"Exploring activities for the older person. Tap dancing and stained glass work seemed mainly for women"

Most of the participants found the programme enjoyable. For example:

"The people doing the stained glass work was very impressive. They seemed to enjoy themselves quietly and their work was creative and seemed to be of a high standard"

The "Cameo" dance group appealed to people, because of the fun and determination of the women. The programme succeeded in showing what one can do if you set your mind to it.

However, some of the panellists said that there were aspects of the programme that they did not like. In particular, they felt that a lot of the people shown were behaving inappropriately for their age. For example:

"I didn't like seeing old people making fools of themselves - the marathon. They are only making work for the doctors"

Another example:

"I didn't like most of it. The dancers were embarrassing and didn't appeal to me. The chase was very silly. The 82 year old man looked happy and fit - fit enough to do something more useful. The programme was warning not to try and recapture the days of my youth, unless you don't mind looking foolish"

However, a lot of the things seen by viewers appealed to them, in particular the stained glass



work. A number of people were inspired by the carefree attitude of the people shown:

"Perhaps I could form a dance group and entertain people. There must be lots of outlets where entertainment is needed"

#### 5.4 Life is for living

The key message picked up by the viewers of this programme was that life doesn't come to a stop in old age:

"...Activities of a group who don't accept they are too old to lead an active life once you have turned 50"

A lot of the viewers said that they really enjoyed watching this programme and particularly emphasised the enjoyment that older people can get out of life:

"I liked watching how energetic and enthusiastic people were. It's amazing what you can achieve"

As with most of the programmes there were a few specific dislikes associated with the programme, for example one person didn't like George Melly. However, there were some more fundamental issues that troubled some of the viewers:

"There was no worthwhile exposure of elderly ethnic minorities"

"Maybe the programme was too bland and trivial really"

"It didn't show how elderly people help with charity things, such as visiting hospitals or working in charity shops"

The ideas that people had after watching the programme were fairly varied, ranging from specific ideas about possible activities to do, such as amateur dramatics, to a person who said that they needed to be more active than they previously had been. One interesting response was the lady who strongly disliked the idea of age-segregation:

"The idea of people getting together just because they are all of a certain age doesn't appeal to me"

When asked what new ideas the programme suggested, she emphasised the need to mix with younger people:

"It brought home the attraction of mixing with younger people as against the idea of oldies' clubbing together"

It is important to remember that viewers are able to make up their own minds and form their own opinions. The solution that the women in the programme had found was not appropriate to this individual. While the intentions of the programme-makers may not have been to be

prescriptive about how people should live their lives, this is the kind of impression that is often left in the minds of viewers. Of course it should be emphasised that the programme "worked" in the sense of stimulating a person to look at their attitudes and behaviour.

### 5.5 Something completely different

The underlying theme of the series - that people in the Third Age can lead full and active lives - came across strongly. Panellists also pointed out that many of the people shown on the programme were making positive decisions about their life and facing up to the challenges and opportunities of growing older. The panellists said that they enjoyed the varied and stimulating content of the programme. Three key words frequently figured in viewers descriptions. Firstly, the **achievement** of the people shown:

"It illustrated what could be achieved by older people and how full their lives can be if they adopt an optimistic and positive attitude and involve themselves in many different activities"

Secondly, the **determination** of the people shown:

"It showed what can be achieved with determination - the lady who set up her own business from a broken-down shop to a thriving business"

Finally, these people should be **admired** for what they achieved:

"Nothing stood in the way of doing something different. I admired every one of them"

The programme did provoke a lot of negative comment. This focused on the people shown in the programme being unrepresentative of older people in general. This had two dimensions. Firstly, the people shown had the resources to do what they wanted to do, whereas some of the viewers felt that older people are often constrained by their circumstances or income. For example:

"There's not much people can do in terraced houses in industrial areas. The programme wasn't down to the level of basic life. It showed middle-class and moneyed people looking for a side-line through boredom"

"It was too middle-class. Are the same opportunities there for poor pensioners?"

Secondly, the achievements of some of the individuals shown went far beyond what people felt they could reasonably aspire to:

"How many people of this age group can summon up the commitment to complete a triathlon?"

"It showed only successes - many people must have failed"

"B Merrifield was so untypical - the chance of anyone becoming a successful actor is a million to one"

This second issue is probably the more significant. Rather than providing inspirational role models, the portrayal of "super-achievers" appeared to alienate some people. Programmes that seek to emphasise the potential for achievement in the Third Age need to be grounded in the reality that is perceived by older people.

The programme did not appear to prompt many new ideas in the minds of the viewers. Perhaps this indicates that the people shown were to be admired rather than emulated. Two people were specifically interested in the item on creative writing and said that they were thinking of doing some writing. The John Walters philosophy of the "right to do nothing" was a theme that was attractive to some people.

### 5.6 Home is where the heart is

While people realised that the central theme was concerned with "home" and having a living space, the programme was interpreted in a number of different ways. The kinds of issues mentioned were:

- elderly people who are determined to stay in their own home
- needing space to do what they wanted
- do older people move when they retire or stay with their memories?
- changing your lifestyle
- new opportunities in old age

This diversity was reflected in the things that people said they particularly liked about the programme:

- the courage to do totally new things
- pensioners are looked after better in Denmark
- retired projectionist converting his garage into a cinema
- people doing what they always wanted to do
- how people in sheltered accommodation seemed happy with their lot

Nothing was significantly disliked in the programme. One person did point to the us and them situation that affects people in retirement:

"The programme made me a little envious of those with the money to realise their

dreams of retirement"

The image of the Third Age as the "Golden Age", where one can fulfil lifetime ambitions has to be tempered with the economic realities that constrain most people who live on a pension.

The home environment appears to taken on added significance in later years and the kinds of ideas suggested to the viewers by the programme centred around how the home can be used to adapt to changes in later life. In particular the issue of moving or staying-put was emphasised:

"I always assumed that retired people sold their homes and got somewhere smaller, but this is often not the case. Having space is often more important than having less area to clean - "limitation will come soon enough"

### 5.7 Singles

The "Singles" programmes conveyed three main messages to the viewers. The most dominant message was related to overcoming bereavement and facing up to life after the death of a partner. For example:

"It was about making a life for themselves after losing a partner. However hard it is you need to take up new activities to get out and get noticed"

Secondly, some people emphasised the romantic overtones of some of the items. Indeed, one woman pointed to the possibility of women being exploited:

"It harked back to romance. Getting fixed up with a man who wants looking after. Some women do need men, but they can end up with some geriatric who will take their money for his own family"

Thirdly, the value of "teaming-up" with other people in the same situation is a useful coping strategy.

The viewers did like the theme of coping with life after the loss of a partner and how this traumatic period of life can be approached constructively. For example:

"I liked how it showed how they can come out and mixed with the community. They did their best to make something of their life, which was really good. Dinner dates and dancing is a good way to meet new friends"

Of all the programmes in the Third Age Series, "Singles" provoked the most negative comments. Specifically, eight out of the nine people who watched this programme disliked the item on the gay vicar. At a general level the panellists find the idea of homosexuality distasteful. For example:

"The gay section was obnoxious in the extreme. TV is obsessed with homosexuality.

It wasn't necessary for the programme"

This general antipathy towards homosexuality meant that the scenes showing gay men "...hugging, kissing and dancing" were something that panellists found extremely offensive. While some people accepted homosexuality, they didn't want such explicit portrayal:

"God made us what we are - I agree - but I didn't like to see men dancing together. It just didn't look right"

Only one person had perceived the important moral of the item, that the vicar "had lived a lie for most of his adult life" and had only found his true self in later life after the death of his wife. The particular problem with this item appears not just the issue of homosexuality (see comments on "Couples"), but because of the living of a lie by a vicar who then acknowledged his homosexuality, when he should be the epitome of honesty, traditional morality and religious values.

The programme did highlight the emotional problems facing widowed people. However, the positive approach to dealing practically with bereavement was something that was appreciated by the viewers, particularly in the social domain with the forming of new relationships, perhaps through agencies.

## 5.8 Couples

The content of the programme was perceived to be very diverse by the participants on the panel. This ranged from mentions of very specific items such as punch and judy shows in Blackpool, the attraction of opposites and homosexuality to the more thematic issue of why a relationship can last over a long period of time. This indicated the importance of compatibility between the people in the relationship, their shared activities, mutual respect and sexual attraction.

Regarding what the panellists particularly like about the programmes, the success of second marriages and the happiness of long-term relationships were mentioned. As with the "Singles" programmes, the item dealing with homosexuality caused a lot of negative comment. Perhaps the comments were not as negative as in "Singles". This may be due to the "shock" having worn off by the time "Couples" and that the gay people shown were not members of a church. One person did see this in positive terms:

"The treatment of homosexual partners was excellent, understanding and sensible and helped to destroy the usual gay stereotypes"

In terms of new ideas provoked by the programme, the issue of second marriages was mentioned by several of the viewers. Remarriage in later life is not very common and brings with it some difficult taboos. However, the practical benefits of remarriage was thought provoking.

## 5.9 Rebels with a cause

Generally, viewers felt that this programme was about having a "cause" and trying to get something done about a thing that you feel strongly about. The item about "surfers against sewage" came across as a strong image of such a cause. The "third age" theme of the series did not appear to be as strong and explicit as in some of the other programmes. The attention of some people was focused entirely on the theme of pollution and appeared not to have noticed the role of older people in fighting for the cause.

The absence of an obvious age theme was reflected in what participants liked about the programme. The Caribbean carnival was mentioned as something that was interesting and colourful. They also liked to see people making a stand against injustice and problems such as pollution of the sea. Some people did actually point to the role of older people in these kinds of campaigns:

"...getting a mission in life - It's never too late"

"There is always someone who cares. Perhaps older persons can be better relied on for this"

"Older people give a lot of time, not for themselves, but for the younger generations"

The things that were disliked by the viewers were not criticisms of the programmes themselves, but the issues raised by the programmes. For example, one person was sorry that some older people do not have access to their grandchildren.

The new ideas mentioned by people touched on the injustice of society and the effort required to get things done. One person felt that it should be every grandparents' right to have access to their grandchildren. Only one person mentioned the role of older people:

"Younger people can learn a lot from older people about the art of campaigning against the system"

## 5.10 Dr Feelgood

This programme was strongly themed in so far as the participants were very consistent in terms of their interpretations of the underlying message. Two issues were commonly mentioned: dealing with, and finding relief from, the stresses associated with later life; and making preparations for death. Some people were more specific about the programmes content, listing items such as going into the retreat, making a living-will.

The more sombre and serious tone of this programme was clearly recognised and appreciated by the participants and only one person said they did not like this tone. The images of how a couple found peace in a retreat and how an ex-POW dealt with his problems were mentioned as items that were particularly liked.

Very few things were disliked by the viewers. As mentioned, one person felt that the

programme was "too morbid". One person was annoyed by the background music.

The programme obviously made an impression on the panel participants. When asked about what new ideas the programme had brought about, nearly everyone mentioned the need to make provision for the future, for example by making will.

### 5.11 Memories

The clear theme memories was well-understood by the viewers. While most people looked back fondly on their memories, it was appreciated that both happy and unhappy memories are important. The memories of life during World War II were of particular significance to the viewers.

This programme was liked very much by the viewers. One man who had not particularly liked the series beforehand said that it was an:

"...Admirable programme to conclude the series. It shows how memories play an important part in the lives of people who have lived the greatest part of their life"

People found many of the items in the programme moving and enjoyable. The participants looked back fondly on the wartime period. While many aspects of this were unhappy, the spirit of "togetherness" conveyed in some of the items struck an important chord. One person said that the programme has "brought back memories I had forgotten"...

Very little was mentioned in terms of dislikes about the programme, reflecting how much people appreciated it. However, one black participant was disappointed that the BBC could not find a black serviceman who had served in Europe in WWII.

### 5.12 The overall message of the programmes

The panellists picked up a strong image running through all the programmes of older people being active and making the most of their lives. Underlying this is perhaps the recognition that their time is finite and should be used positively. Despite this each programme provided its own message and variation around the central theme. This appeared to engage most of the panellists who watched many more of the programmes than they were initially required.

At this point it is useful to summarise the key messages that were being picked up by the viewers.

#### 5.12.1 Age itself is not a barrier

Chronological age is not a determining factor in people's lives - you are "as old as you feel". Panel members recognised a range of ideas related to this theme: people can still achieve important goals in later life; they can do something constructive with their life; people are never too old to take up new things; people can refuse to accept that they are too old to lead

an active life.

### 5.12.2 Older people can make a positive contribution to society

Old age is generally seen as a time of failing abilities, deterioration and dependency, where older people are a "burden" on the productive part of society. However, the skills and experience of older people can be channelled into valuable areas, such as community work. The free time available to retired people allows them to devote their efforts to this kind of work.

### 5.12.3 Facing-up to old age

Old age brings with it many changes, such as loss and bereavement, retirement, loss of income or physical infirmity. One of the important themes identified by viewers is the need to face up to these changes, to cope with them and to make a new life for oneself.

### 5.12.4 The Third Age as an opportunity

While there are many negative aspects to growing older, people recognised that the Third Age also offered opportunities. Freedom from the constraints of work and family commitments means that people are able to fulfil their personal goals and ambitions. Retirement can offer the opportunity to change your lifestyle, to do new things or to pursue the things that you have always wanted to do, but did not have the time.

### 5.12.5 The challenge of ageing

Whilst the Third Age can be seen as a time of opportunity, many of the people in the programmes were seen to have shown great determination to get what they wanted out of life. This indicates that the process is not easy and that the older person may face particular problems, such as motivating oneself and overcoming the social barriers about what is acceptable for older people to do. A key metaphor is that the older people on the programmes have to **fight** to get what they want. Following on from this, the people who achieve what they want should be **admired** for doing something out of the ordinary. Some of the items shown in the programmes were seen by the viewers to be too far beyond them. This could be a demotivating factor for some people.

### 5.12.6 The programmes as a source of ideas

Following on from the last point, many of the viewers saw the programmes as a source of ideas about new activities in later life. Particular items, such as the stain glass work and creative writing provoked a lot of interest.



### 5.13 What people liked about the programmes

In general, the programmes were enjoyed and appreciated by the members of the panel.

#### 5.13.1 A positive view of old age

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the images of old age held by the panel members were quite negative. The Third Age series consistently challenged the negative stereotypes and was something that the panellists liked to see. All the underlying themes identified above were very appealing to the viewers.

#### 5.13.2 The image older people enjoying themselves

The very negative stereotype of old age associates this part of life with misery and depression. The programmes challenged this very strongly by showing lots of older people having fun and enjoying themselves. Viewers definitely liked to see these older people having a good time.

#### 5.13.3 Specific activities

The content of the programmes was very varied and, regardless of any underlying message, there was a lot in them that was of intrinsic interest to viewers.

### 5.14 What people did not like about the programmes

The first law of market research is that people will say a lot more about what they didn't like than what they actually liked. With regards to the Third Age programmes, there was relatively little that was actively disliked by the panellists. There were a number of "irritants" that reflected people's personal taste.

- The John Walters slot in the programme was quite unpopular. Many people felt that this was out of keeping with the rest of the programme and some people found him quite annoying. The "and why not" theme that the John Walters slot aimed to develop did not appear to make any impression on the viewers
- Some people disliked the parrot, although one person described the parrot as a "star"
- Some people felt that the programmes jumped around too much, making them difficult to follow and preventing interesting items being developed
- The background music was annoying to some people

Beyond these, there were some more fundamental issues raised by panel members. A recurrent dislike across various programmes was that the lack of resources available to many

pensioners means that many of the activities were perceived to be inaccessible to them. A second recurrent dislike was the prominence of "super-achievers", such as the triathlon runner. As mentioned this may act as a de-motivating factor, rather than as a source of inspiration. Finally, the negative reaction to the "gay vicar" item indicates the strength of certain social values amongst the present cohort of Third Agers. While people generally adapt very well to changes over the lifespan, there are certain aspects of social change with which people will remain uncomfortable. The issue of homosexuality and personal morality is obviously one of these.

### 5.15 The ideas prompted by the programmes

An aim of the programmes was to get people to think about their lives and, in particular, taking up activities that might lead to a more fulfilling life in the later years. The programmes worked on several levels. Firstly, people began to challenge the stereotypes associated with old age and for some people this could lead to them changing their lives. Secondly, some people began to critically examine the nature of old age and their own situations specifically. The general theme of the series was fairly straightforward and upbeat and these people began to look at the complexities of life. For example, what are the constraints that operate on people, preventing doing what they want to do? Finally, the programmes operated as a source of ideas for new interests and activities.

It is important to note that people engaged with programmes in different ways, with implications for how they interpreted the programmes. It is possible to identify four main viewer orientations in relation to the Third Age series:

- entertainment
- education
- source of ideas
- information

Media theory argues that the primary use of TV is entertainment. For a few of the panellists this appeared to be their main concern and they evaluated programmes solely in terms of entertainment value. Hence negative comments about programmes being "too morbid" when dealing with serious issues such as death or bereavement. However, it was clear that the other modes of engagement were also important. The success of the programmes in getting their messages across and getting people to examine their lives and think about the ageing process indicates the effectiveness of the programmes in an educative sense.

Some people approached the programmes in a very naive and literal way. For these people, the underlying messages were poorly appreciated and the programmes were seen mainly as a pot-pourri of possible activities. While some of these activities may have provoked their interest and prompted them to do new things, there would obviously be no guarantee that they would find specific activities to suit their tastes.

Finally, the idea of TV as a source of information implies interactive element to a programme, for example to follow-up interesting items. The use of Teletext is an obvious avenue for this. However, the publication of the Third Age magazine is an important facet to the success of the series from an information point of view.

### 5.16 Key "old age" themes

The main benefit of qualitative research is that interviewees are not constrained by predefined responses, but are free to express their views and opinions in their own words. This allows the research to "pick up", in an inductive way, the things that are really important to the people being researched. The Third Age programmes provided a varied picture of later life, around the broad idea of "life is for living", which provoked the panel members to reflect on ageing and old age in general and on their own situations specifically. The comments provided by the participants pointed to a number of "themes" underlying their experience of later life. Whilst there is no statistical text for the significance of these themes, their importance is indicated by several factors such as the strength of feeling expressed by the person and the frequency by which unconnected people make the same unsolicited observation.

#### 5.16.1 Behaving appropriately

One of the aims of the series was to challenge the stereotypes old age; people should not be constrained by the negative images and roles and should be free to act and behave as they see fit. Developing this theme, the Third Age programmes showed older people behaving in a way that may not be associated with older people or doing things which may be seen as the preserve of the younger generations. Examples include the feature of the Cameo dance group, the surfers in Cornwall and the triathlon competitor.

The views of the people on the panel suggested an ambivalent attitude towards the behaviour of older people. For some people, the Third Age should not necessarily be any different to earlier stages of life:

"The programme showed that you are as old as you feel and age should not be a barrier to enjoying life, by dancing etc and doing most of the things one did when younger"

While none of the people featured in the series could be described as outrageous, a number of people on the panel felt very uncomfortable with some of the items. For example, words like "embarrassing" and "ridiculous" were used to describe the Cameo group. While nobody would argue with the premise of self-determination and choice, there appears to be boundaries which determine whether something is appropriate or inappropriate for older people. This appears to be related to the problem of how people feel they should meet the changes associated with later life - should one act as if age was not a significant factor, or should one accept the inevitable? Fundamentally, there appears to be unease with people who try to recapture their youth:

"The 'Living It Up' programme was about having fun. In a sense **pretending** to be young again"

### 5.16.2 The significance of being a grandparent

Recent gerontological research has emphasised the role of grandparenting in modern society. Being a grandparent has emotional benefits for the older person and self-esteem can be enhanced through undertaking tasks such as child minding. In many ways being a grandparent can be more fulfilling than being a parent as the responsibilities and worries are less onerous.

It is possible to discern that the grandparenting role has become more instrumentally significant in recent years. With more mothers going out to work and changes in community reciprocity, grandparents often play an important role in bringing-up their grandchildren. This growing significance may be reflected in the responsibilities and rights associated with grandparenting, such as right of access to grandchildren. However, with the rights and responsibilities associated with grandparenting comes the potential of conflict. What happens if the grandparent feels they are being used by their children, for example as unpaid child minders? What happens if the parents divorce?

### 5.16.3 The wisdom of experience

Older people have accumulated a wealth of skills, experience and knowledge that could be used to good effect in the Third Age. Many older people feel that younger generations could learn a lot listening to older people. Many older people have a desire to communicate and to tell younger people what life was like in the past. Economic, social and technological change has made the world a very different place to what it was fifty years ago. Moreover, different generations have unique experiences that define their generation as distinct from others. In particular, World War II was something that created a particular social climate that sets that generation who experienced it apart from those born afterwards.

There is a negative side to these issues. A lot of the skills of older people have become redundant as society, the economy and industry have changed over recent years. While many skills remain relevant, a lot of older people feel marginalised by the process of change. For example, unemployed men in their 50s and 60s often feel they are useless as they have seen traditional jobs disappear. Many older people feel socially marginalised within society. While the desire to communicate amongst some people is very strong, many people think that the younger generation is not interested in what they have to say. These factors may be psychological rather than material, but they may have a significant effect on the morale and confidence of many older people and ultimately the way they choose to live in the Third Age.

#### 5.16.4 Making provision

While gerontological research shows that older people are neither obsessed with, or afraid of, the prospect of death, it is perhaps the unique existential quality of later life. This was touched upon by "Doctor Feelgood", which was probably the least upbeat of all the programmes. The issues tackled in this programme, although "too morbid" for some, was appreciated by the majority. While the prospect of death is very much around the corner, it is something that is seldom discussed either intimately or publicly and older people have little external reference for their own ideas, thoughts and fears. The idea of making provision for death or incapacity was something that was perceived to be important by many of the panel members.

#### 5.16.5 Age segregation

The series as a whole tended to show older people with older people (see section on specific issues), rather than part of society as a whole. For most people this was not a problem, but some were very emphatic that they preferred the company of younger people.

## 6. RESULTS OF TOPS QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

### 6.1 The TOPS Survey

As stated in the Section 2, the evaluation of the Third Age series was to include both qualitative and quantitative approaches. As well as the essentially qualitative data provided by the in-depth panel, quantitative data was provided by questions included in the Television Opinion Panels Survey (TOPS). This is a panel of some three thousand people in Britain who are surveyed on a weekly basis to access their opinions on a whole range of networked programmes. Questions on the Third Age series were included at week six of transmission and at week ten, after transmission of the final programme. Data presented in this section is taken from the TOPS questionnaires administered after final transmission. This included 10 closed and open-format questions covering: reasons for watching/not watching the programmes; what people liked about the programmes; whether people changed their attitudes towards old age; whether people changed their behaviour as a result of watching; and the portrayal of older people on TV.

### 6.2 Watching the series

2732 panel members were asked whether or not they had watched any of the ten THIRD AGE programmes. Of these, 46 people said they had watched the series and 2686 had not. Reasons for not watching the programmes are summarised in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Reasons why people did not watch the series

not aware that the programmes had been screened	26%
can't or don't watch TV at this time	62%
programmes were not aimed at my age group	10%
watching something else on another channel	7%
the title (THIRD AGE) put me off	7%
the topics weren't of interest to me	5%
someone else chose not to watch	1%
read something about it and didn't think I'd like it	1%
other reason	8%
no answer	1%

The two main reasons given for not having watched the programmes were that people can't/don't watch TV at this time or that they were unaware of the programmes being on. This supports a general feeling of the in-depth respondents who felt that the programmes were screened at an inconvenient time. Afternoons were times when elderly people tend to go out having completed the household chores. They felt that an early evening slot (around 4-6 pm) would catch more potential viewers. Data from the yesterday diaries suggests that this is indeed a common time for elderly people to take a break and watch TV.

The other reasons given in the TOPS survey are also significant. The results indicate that targeting the series specifically at the third age has certainly influenced a lot of people to avoid watching the programmes. However, a substantial proportion of the in-depth participants said that the programmes did have something to offer to younger viewers. They felt that younger viewers could benefit from learning about the lives of older generations in an educational and awareness raising series such as *The Third Age*. Care would have to be taken over classifying and titling such a series in order that younger viewers see the programmes as relevant and interesting.

Of the 46 people who did watch the programmes, the majority were males (approximately 59%), of social classes C2, DE and aged 55+ years. Most had actively chosen to watch the programmes (52%) while 32% stated that the TV simply happened to be on at the time.

Table 6.2 shows the number of programmes watched by the viewers. The majority had watched more than one programme. For some, the programmes were clearly attractive with 10% of the sample watching between eight and all ten programmes and a median of 37% watching two or three programmes. Very few people had elected to actively avoid the programme after watching only a few minutes. It would seem that having decided to watch, the viewers attention is held to the end of the transmission.

Table 6.2 Number of programmes watched by TOPS viewers

all ten	6%
eight or nine	4%
six or seven	2%
four or five	16%
two or three	37%
one	24%
only a few minutes	4%
(n = 46)	

### 6.3 Viewers' evaluation of the series

The 46 TOPS viewers who had watched Third Age programmes were asked to rate the series on a range of attitudinal statements. The statements were designed to investigate both positive and negative evaluations of programme content as well as people's reactions towards a series aimed specifically at a third age audience. The results are presented in percentages in Table 6.3.

In general, the content of the programmes are evaluated in a positive way. They are seen as interesting, enjoyable and for many (55%), contained an educational basis. Viewers said programmes were neither patronising, boring nor confusing and indeed many (48%) expressed a desire to see more. The sample was evenly divided into those who had tried to watch every programme and those who had not. It would seem that the series was sufficiently attractive for a large proportion of people (38%) to actively pursue it every week.

Enjoyment of the series may well be based in part on its perceived high quality, wide ranging topic areas and the fact that many viewers appreciated seeing positive images of older people on TV. They liked to see older people busy, active (85%) and enjoying themselves (92%). Given the relative success of the series, as indicated by these statements, it is hardly surprising to find that 95% of the panel thought that making programmes specially for the Third Age was a good idea and would like to see more (70%).

Not only were the programmes positively evaluated, but they were also effective in providing 'food for thought'. Some viewers said the series had made them think more about life in later years (53%) while others had derived good ideas about things that they could do themselves (59%). Clearly the programme worked well in raising consciousness about Third Age concerns and enabled people to relate messages in the series to their own lives.



Table 6.3. Attitudinal Evaluations of the Series

Key AS = agree strongly                      N = 39 for statements 1 2 3  
 A = agree                                        N = 38 " "                      5 10 12 13 14  
 N = neither agree nor disagree        N = 37 " "                      4 6 8 11 16  
 D = disagree                                    N = 36 " "                      9 17  
 DS = disagree strongly                    N = 35 " "                      7 15

Statement	AS	A	N	D	DS
Interesting	10	70	12	6	2
Educational	0	55	36	6	4
Boring	4	3	20	55	18
Enjoyable	5	64	20	7	4
Good quality series	4	74	16	1	4
Covered a wide range of issues	12	65	19	4	0
Confusing	0	2	8	69	21
Left me wanting to see more	4	44	31	10	11
Tried to watch every programme	5	33	25	23	15
Made me think more about life in later years	10	43	17	23	7
Gave me some good ideas about things to do	4	55	19	15	7
Like seeing older people busy and active	7	78	15	0	0
Like seeing older people enjoy themselves	12	80	9	0	0
People featured were typical of their age	3	56	27	11	4
It was patronising	4	12	35	48	2
Good to have some programmes made specially for older people	38	57	2	2	2
I'd like to watch more programmes made specially for older people	34	36	21	4	5

#### 6.4 What the respondents liked about the series

The respondents were asked, in an open ended format, what they liked and disliked about the series. This allowed people the freedom to express their own thoughts and feelings about the series. Sixteen people responded with their own comments on why they liked the programmes. They said the programmes were unusual in format, carried lots of information

and gave a particularly positive alternative image of life in later years. In addition, they gave insight into other people's real, everyday lives and gave ideas for new activities aimed at the older person:

"Shows that a large number of years don't equate to old. Good health keeps one young" Male 55+ years

"It is refreshing to find a programme covering my own age group" Male 55+ years

"I am interested in the life stories of the people who have appeared on the programme. I like the variety of items and the positive attitudes" Female 55+ years

"They do portray older people in a sensible way, after all we are not a separate species". Male 55+ years

"Fun and modern way the programme was put across to viewers" Female 16-24 years

### 6.5 What the respondents disliked about the programmes

While the overall evaluation of the series was very positive, there were some negative comments made by seven of the 46 viewers. Two people felt the tone of the programmes was patronising,

"Patronising - all trying to fill in time before death" Female 45-54 years

Three people complained that the programmes were broadcast at an inappropriate time'

"I would like to see these programmes but they are shown at an unsuitable time for a working woman" Female 55+ years

Another person disliked the parrot and another found them tedious,

"Only the parrot noises and the intrusion of the large parrot symbol superimposed on people speaking to camera" Female 55+

The issue of background noise, while only mentioned here by one person, was an important objection raised within the in-depth interviews. Complaints were aimed at the parrot and background music which in some instances obliterated spoken words and hindered peoples comprehension of the messages within the programmes. The ability to distinguish between spoken language and background noise declines with age. The impediments imposed by age related declining faculties (visual as well as auditory) on understanding media sources such as TV and radio need further research attention.

## 6.6 Changing attitudes

When asked whether the series had **changed** the way they thought about life in later years, a relatively high proportion of the 46 series viewers said that it had (23%). Seven people commented on the way in which thinking had changed. Comments included,

"Made me want to plan my life so I don't end up sitting in my armchair doing nothing all day" (Female 25-34 years)

"The later years can be seen as a time to start new activities rather than giving up things and 'winding down'" (Female 55+ years)

"AS an OAP warden I found this programme really interesting and helpful in my work" (Female 35-44 years)

"Proved (and showed) to viewers that you can still be active, take up new hobbies, and have lots of fun in later life, as opposed to 'going out to pasture'" (Female 16-24 years)

Of the seven people who commented, only two were in the target age (55+ years) and only one was male. As indicated earlier, the series evidently was of interest and effective in changing attitudes not only to Third Agers, but also to a younger audience.

## 6.7 Changed behaviours

One of the most interesting questions the research investigated was whether or not the series had the potential to change viewers behaviour. Did it encourage them to take up new activities and hobbies? The panel was asked whether they were likely to do anything as a result of watching the programmes. Four people (8%) said they definitely would and a further seven people (16%) said they might do. In all, nine people provided comments on what they intended to do in response to watching the series. These included a range of hobbies (gardening, painting drawing), going on holiday and money management:

"I am not of retiring age yet. I plan to make more time for my painting and drawing" (Female 55+ years)

"The programme has had an anti-old age effect. I am studying for a degree involved in sponsoring 3rd world topics - not knitting/glass cutting/memory lane activities as suggested by the series! The series has been a warning of what my life could have become" (Female 45-54 years)

"Took hints on money management and made notes of agencies that can help old people" (Male 55+ years)

"Hobbies, holidays and gardening" (Female 55+ years)

Clearly the series has reached and motivated a significant proportion of its viewers to actually or potentially change their lifestyles by adding new activities.

## 6.8 TV images of older people

The Third Age Series was designed to present a very positive image of life in later years. The last question in the TOPS survey assessed the overriding current images of elderly people on TV. Respondents were asked whether or not they agreed or disagreed with a set of words as accurate descriptors of older people as portrayed on TV. The stimulus words were derived from a small pilot study in which people were asked to describe the elderly as seen on TV in an open ended way. Commonly used positive and negative words constituted the list presented in the TOPS survey. A total of 2716 people replied. The results are given as percentages in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 Images of the older people on TV

Descriptor	Percentage
Wise	11
Lonely	28
Frail	23
Caring	8
Cantankerous	25
In poor health	23
Intelligent	7
Tired	14
Active	8
Boring	12
Unhappy	19
Generous	4
Intolerant	21
A burden on their families	21
Having interesting lives	5
A burden on society	16
Sociable	6
Unable to do much	21
Skilled	2
Happy with their life	6

The results present a predominantly negative view. TV images of elderly people are interpreted by viewers as predominantly lonely, frail, cantankerous, in poor health, intolerant, a burden on their family and unable to do much. Over 20% of the sample agreed with these descriptors. Notably they did not see the elderly on TV as caring, intelligent, active, generous, skilled, living happy or interesting lives (less than 10% of the sample elected to use these descriptors). This very negative set of images contrasts strongly with the positive up-beat theme of the Third Age series and also contrasts with media research which indicates that older people are shown in a relatively positive light.

## 6.9 Television's role in influencing change

While there are indications that the Third Age series has changed the way people think about ageing and the elderly in a positive direction, and has influenced behavioural intentions, it is as yet unclear whether such changes are long or short term phenomena. It is also unclear as to how effective one series of ten programmes can be in promoting positive images of the elderly the light of drama, sit-com etc portrayals of a more negative character. Furthermore, details of the process by which media may influence attitudinal and lifestyle change need to be thoroughly explored. This would enable a more thorough understanding of how the programme elements, themes and atmospheres contribute to a person's lay theories about their world. As such, research is required in order to monitor the potential role TV plays in terms of:

- creating and sustaining both positive and negative images of the elderly on TV and in society
- elucidating the processes through which attitudinal and behavioural change may be effected

## 6.10 CONCLUSION

The results from the TOPS survey provides broad support for the conclusions drawn from the in-depth study, with the quantitative data providing an important source of validation of the results from qualitative analysis in Section 4. The Third Age series:

- was rated very positively by the TOPS viewers
- appeared to have influenced the way people think about later life
- has had an impact on the actual and potential behaviour of older viewers

However, the numbers of people actually watching the series was small, reflecting the point that many people do not choose to watch television at the time the series was transmitted. This is clearly a problem. While the programme is enjoyed by viewers and is successful in challenging and changing attitudes and behaviour, only a limited proportion of the potential audience of Third Agers was actually reached.

## 7. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

### 7.1 Introduction

As part of the research a number of questions were raised by the BBC for specific investigation. These focused on whether the programmes were representative of the older population as a whole, or whether there was any bias in favour of particular social groups. Three specific issues were explored:

- Are all the activities shown in the programmes accessible to all older people?
- Do the programmes emphasise the separation or integration of younger and older people?
- Are all types of people/experience represented in the series?

Questions relating to these issues were incorporated in the third interview schedule with the in-depth panel (n=18), to allow people's opinions to be explored in detail.

### 7.2 Where all the activities shown in the programmes accessible to all older people?

People were asked "do you need money to do the things in the programmes?". Ten people said that money was a necessary factor. For example:

"Yes, you do need money to do a lot of the things shown in the programmes and that's great for someone like me. But how many old people could travel to Holland? Something like bridge is not expensive but how many play that? Dancing is available I suppose, but they could have shown more things that cost nothing"

Participants were also asked whether the programmes were mainly for people who were fit and active. Again most people (16 out of 18) felt that the programmes were for the fit and the active and that few items were shown that were relevant to frail or disabled people:

"You should show what frail people can do. They were all very active in the programmes"

While the programmes did not show much for frail or disabled people, this was seen in the context of the main message of the series:

"There wasn't a lot for people who were frail and elderly, but that wasn't the point of the programmes. They were meant to shake those who could be active out of their apathy"

While accessibility was influenced mainly by resources and health/fitness, other mentioned were travel constraints and personality factors, such as shyness.

### 7.3 Did the programmes emphasise the separation or integration of younger and older people?

People were asked whether the programmes showed "enough of younger and older people together". Fifteen people said that there was not enough shown of younger and older people together. There are two points to make here. People wanted to see older people as part of general society and not as a separate group on the basis of their age. Secondly, if programmes are to show older and younger people together, then they should not over-emphasise the old as dependent on the young.

Participants were asked whether programmes for older people should just show older people. Five people wanted them specifically for older people, but the majority, thirteen, wanted to see older and younger people shown together. For example:

"Older people are not just older people, but are part of society and they mix with youngsters in society and so it's no use to start separating them"

People were also asked whether they thought the programmes would be of interest to younger people. Opinion was split on this issue with ten saying yes and eight saying no. In general people felt that the series could raise awareness of what old age is all about amongst younger people:

"Showing the older ones doing active things will make them (younger people) think. So the young would learn to relate with older people, rather than just showing them in a corner. Learning starts with the young"

### 7.4 Were all types of people represented in the series?

A key issue was whether the series was biased in favour of certain sections of society. Twelve people did feel that there was bias in the programmes. They felt that there was an emphasis in favour of:

- middle class people
- the wealthy
- white people
- the fit and healthy
- women
- the "young-old" (60-70 years)

People were then asked specifically whether there was any bias in respect to sex, age, region, ethnicity and social class.



#### 7.4.1 Gender

Fifteen people felt that the programmes were for both sexes to watch, although there was an awareness that more women were shown. Only three people felt that they were "women's programmes" with activities for women at the exclusion of older males.

#### 7.4.2 Age

Participants were asked whether a particular age-group was catered for. Generally, it was felt that the programmes were aimed at the young-old in their early retirement years. For example:

"It is not for anyone in their fifties. Maybe from about sixty onwards, but not for your older old, that's your seventy-five and overs"

#### 7.4.3 Regionality

It should be remembered that the sample was drawn from the north west of England. In general, people felt that there was a southern bias with only seven people saying that all parts of Britain were represented in the programmes. Also people felt that inner-city areas were excluded and that very distinct regions, such as Wales were under-represented.

#### 7.4.4 Ethnicity

Only six people felt that ethnic issues were sufficiently addressed and these were all white people, males and females. This means that a considerable proportion of the panel, twelve people, three ethnic minority people and nine whites, felt that the needs of minority ethnic groups were not adequately covered. For example:

"There was certainly not enough on racial minorities, and what there was, was flashed over very quickly. Even the Jamaicans were stereotypes"

The involvement of participants from ethnic minority groups, particularly the Asian (Gujerati-speakers), presented considerable problems to the research. As a result a group discussion with 12 Gujerati-speakers, aged between 65 and 90 in Bolton was conducted in order to get a better insight into their responses to and evaluations of one of the programmes; "Home is where the Heart Is". The group discussion was conducted with the help of an interpreter.

In general this group found the programme impossible to follow, because of the succession of different English accents. Moreover, much of the programme failed to relate to their lifestyles. For example, a retired man who bought a boat was seen as "too luxurious for us". Also the interpretation of the meanings of the programmes is often culturally determined. For instance, background music which suggests serenity and peace to an English viewer, contrasted strongly with Indian music. Thus, the Asian viewers were not cued into the mood

and meaning of this section of the programme, detracting from their overall comprehension of what was going on.

Again the Asian discussion group did not relate well to the key issues covered in the programmes. For example, most of the people felt geographically constrained by a strong kinship network, so that ideas about becoming more independent and active were sometimes inappropriate. Women in the group were frustrated by the dominant image of the independent, middle-class, self-confident, ex-career women in the public sphere. This contrasted markedly with their own domestic lifestyle. For example, even going shopping on their own to a non-Asian supermarket was beyond their experience. Hence, images of older women setting-up their own business was very alien.

Overall, language was a major barrier to the Third Age series, preventing any sort of genuine understanding or willingness to concentrate. The programmes from their point of view, were biased towards elderly white people, with an affluent lifestyle. The Asians contrasted their own philosophical expectations of old age and their different cultural values and attitudes towards independence with those shown on the programme. From this, it would appear to be extremely difficult to integrate the interests of highly culturally distinct groups within a series that is aimed at a general audience.

#### **7.4.5 Social Class**

Four people felt that there was no social class bias. One person felt there was an emphasis on working class people, while thirteen people felt there was a middle-class bias.

#### **7.4.6 Significance of programme bias**

Finally people were asked whether any of the biases and emphases that they had noticed had put them off the Third Age series. Thirteen people felt that the biases had little real significance to them personally. Five people did feel alienated, but apart from the people in the Asian group, this did not appear to be due to any specific bias mentioned above. In general, the biases mentioned were made in response to our specific questioning, rather than as spontaneous evaluations of the Third Age programmes.

## 8. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We know from the research that the Third Age series has had a significant influence on viewers' attitudes towards later life and on their behaviour. We do not know so well the process that lies behind this influence. Further research is required to give a deeper insight into:

- Who is it changing? What are the differences between individuals and audiences and what are their potential for change?
- What needs to be challenged? What are the negative images of old age?
- How to change? What is the most effective way to challenge stereotypes in terms of programme format and kinds of information and ideas provided?

Four related areas of further research are suggested to answer these questions.

### 8.1 Follow-up study of the impact of the Third Age Series

The "before and after" design of the in-depth panel research was designed to assess the impact of the series on the attitudes and behaviour of the viewers. However, we currently only have information on the short-term impact of the series. If the long-term effects of the "Third Age" series is to be fully evaluated, then it will be necessary to undertake a follow-up study of the panel at 3 months and 6 months after final transmission. This will allow us to fully assess the potential of programmes such as the Third Age to effect change on a permanent basis.

### 8.2 Images of old age on television

TV plays a key role in shaping attitudes in modern society. However, current research, both in the UK and abroad, on media images of old age is still fairly limited. There is a need to look more deeply at the images of old age in general and on television specifically, in terms of:

- What are the key images - eg characters, personalities etc?
- How are they created by programme-makers?
- How are they interpreted by viewers?

The Third Age series has been an attempt to challenge the stereotypes of old age. This research would provide precise information on WHAT has to be challenged in any future series on, or for, older people.

### **8.3 The relationship between older people and television**

The important issue here is how people "engage" with television? This engagement refers to the different ways that people use and respond to the television in their homes. It is a complex process that may vary from person to person, and indeed the individual's mode of engagement may vary during the day. Key questions are:

- What are the modes of engaging with TV, eg entertainment, information, or as "background" in the house
- What are the viewer's objective behind these, eg entertainment can be for relaxation or stimulation
- What are the moderating factors, eg lifestyle, personal habits, format of programmes
- To what extent can programmes be multi-purpose, eg can they be entertaining and truly educational at the same time

### **8.4 What is the process by which a person integrates images and ideas from television into their everyday reality?**

A person should not be seen as a passive receiver or absorber of information from television. Instead we must look at the ways information from the TV is assimilated and accommodated within the person's existing ideas and theories. For example, the "representation" of old age is something that does exist simply in the TV picture or in a person's mind. This representation is a dynamic transaction between external images (such as the TV), the person's knowledge of other old people, and the person's understanding of themselves. To fully understand the potential educational impact of TV it is necessary to look at the role of the media within this process. Key questions include:

- To what extent are people amenable to changing their views and attitudes?
- How powerful is television in presenting ideas and messages?
- How does the way the information is presented influence attitude formation?

### **8.5 Benefits of research**

This research would:

- provide valuable strategic information for the planning of future programmes, in terms of themes, format and audience targeting
- help to maximise the impact of future programmes in an educational sense

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research has been twofold. Firstly, information has been provided on viewers reactions to the programme, in terms of likes and dislikes, viewing preferences and behaviours and attitudes towards the programmes. However, a second and more fundamental aim has been to assess whether the series has had an impact on the attitudes and behaviour of its target audience. Has the implicit message - to make the most of life in the Third Age - been translated into people's everyday life? Given the controversy over the impact of TV on the minds and actions of viewers, then this was a very ambitious objective and judgements of the relative "success" of the series could have been made even without the evidence of these kinds of changes. However, the research indicates that not only did the viewers enjoy the programmes, but that many of them changed their ideas about themselves and old age in general and also adopted a more active approach to life.

### 9.1 Viewers' evaluation of the series

In general, viewers were very positive towards the programmes. When asked to rate the programmes, the majority of people said that they "liked the programmes a lot". Moreover, viewers seemed to like the programmes more over time, indicating that the Third Age worked very well as a series. Nearly a third of them watched four or more of the programmes and actively tried to watch the programmes every week. Programmes were rated as interesting, enjoyable, educational, covering a wide range of issues, thought provoking, good quality, not difficult to understand. Very few people used negative words such as "boring" to describe the programmes. People said that they particularly liked to see older people enjoying themselves and keeping active and busy. People were also very much in favour of further programmes for the older viewer.

Negative comments were fairly specific, reflecting personal taste in respect to format, background music, the John Walters slot, the parrot and so on. Beyond these very specific comments, some people did raise some more fundamental problems. The question of having enough money to take part in many of the activities featured was frequently raised. For many people who live on a basic state pension even some of the fairly straightforward activities featured on the programme could prove too costly. It was also felt that the programmes were primarily for fit and healthy older people, and offered only limited ideas for frail elderly people. There was some feeling that ethnic minorities were not really catered for. The use of "super-achievers" - older people who do extraordinary things like competing in triathlons - disaffected some people, who felt that these people were not representative of Third Agers in general.

One of the objectives of the series was to be "free of patronising voices or assumptions" in respect to Third Age issues. The judgement of whether the series was successful in this respect needs to be made by the viewers themselves. While the majority were not aware of any patronising tone or material, a few people did feel that this was evident and some were definitely irritated. These people said that they didn't like to be:

- told what to do
- told that being fit and active was the only valid option
- told that they didn't about these kinds of activities in the first place

However, these negative comments have to be put into perspective. No series is going to be universally liked and it should be remembered that the great majority of viewers were very positive about the series.

## 9.2 Did the programmes change people's attitudes and behaviour?

The key issue in the whole of the research was the impact of the series on the attitudes and behaviour of the viewers. Did the underlying message of the programme - to make the most out of life in the later years - get translated into new ways of thinking about later life and the uptake of new activities, hobbies and interests? This question was approached in two ways:

- by asking viewers whether the programmes had influenced them
- by independently monitoring changes in attitudes and behaviour

The research looked at changes in the way people thought about old age in general, how they saw themselves and whether they changed their lifestyles as a result of watching the programmes.

### 9.2.1 Changes in the ways people think about old age in general

The Third Age series was set up to challenge the negative stereotypes that surround ageing and old age. A starting point for the research was to examine these stereotypes in more detail. Certainly, the common image of old age is primarily negative, with people using words such as lonely, awkward, living in the past, widowed and stay-at-home. These negative images of old age are not restricted to younger age groups, but are shared by most older people themselves.

It also has to be remembered that TV itself is involved in creating and maintaining social attitudes and that the Third Age series has to be seen in the context of drama, sit-coms, documentaries, etc that may portray later life in very different ways. As with general images of old age, the research suggests that people see older people portrayed on TV in predominantly negative ways. Older people on TV are perceived as being lonely, frail, cantankerous, unhealthy, intolerant, inactive and a burden on others. Obviously, this contrasts sharply with the very positive themes in the Third Age programmes. Interestingly, the public's perception also contrasts with findings from other research which suggests that TV portrays older people in a relatively positive light.

The key research question here is whether the programmes were successful in challenging the dominant, negative image of old age. The evidence from all the different research

approaches suggests that the Third Age series was very effective in this respect. In the TOPS survey, nearly a quarter of the people who watched the programmes said that their views of later life had changed and that saw later life in much more positive terms.

The before and after research using the in-depth panel provides even more convincing evidence, in that attitudinal change after watching the programmes was documented independently of what people said about themselves. Specifically, people began to describe old age in much more positive terms and fewer negative descriptors were used.

Certainly, the underlying message of the programmes was well-understood and appreciated by viewers. Changes in attitudes at a general level can be discerned in a much more positive outlook, specifically:

- age itself is not a barrier
- older people can make a positive contribution to society
- the Third Age is not the end of the line, but a time of opportunity
- it is up to the individual has to face up to the challenge of ageing and to determine their own life

### 9.2.2 Changes in the ways people think about themselves

As well as changes in people's ideas about later life in general, the research looked at the how people see themselves and the impact that the series had on the way they viewed their life and circumstances. Overall, people have fairly positive self-images and are satisfied with their lives and situations. This does not mean that people are not open to change. Indeed, low expectations about old age in general may lead people to be satisfied with a relatively circumscribed existence and a low standard of living. The Third Age series, thus had to prompt people to look at their lives critically, to raise consciousness about their own potential and to explore opportunities for doing new things.

The research suggests that after watching the programmes, people began to evaluate their lives more in terms of the criteria outlined by the series. Their hopes and plans for the future also changed to include an emphasis on a more active lifestyle. After watching the series, people also tended to have developed a more positive attitude towards their own ageing and seeing the opportunities that the Third Age offers.

It is important to have some idea of the potential for change within a particular audience group. Despite being very satisfied with life prior to the series, the older viewers seemed to warm wholeheartedly to the message of the programmes. After watching the series they did not become bitter or highly dissatisfied with life, but appeared to recognise that life could and should be more fulfilling.

### 9.2.3 Changes in lifestyle and patterns of activity

The research also looked at whether Third Agers changed their behaviour or used their time differently after watching the series. The results of the in-depth research suggested that over half the panel said they were definitely or possibly going to do something. Indeed, five of the 18 people on the panel had already taken up some new activity since watching the programmes. People had begun to look critically at their lives and a majority of the in-depth panel wanted to see change in their lives. The quantitative data supports these results, with a quarter of the TOPS people who watched the series saying they would do something as a result of the Third Age programmes.

The kinds of new activities mentioned by viewers were very varied, ranging from keep fit and dancing to night school classes. The impact was not just in terms of new activities. For example, some people had been influenced by the idea of making a "living will" and had decided to make one out themselves.

The programmes were not used simply as a source of ideas; even a wide-ranging series such as "The Third Age" could not hope to include enough ideas to satisfy everyone. What appeared to be happening was that the programmes prompted people to look around locally for something they liked or pursue something that they had never quite got around to doing.

### 9.3 The potential of education programmes in effecting personal change

The research presented in this report provides evidence that the Third Age series has had a significant effect on its audience. We know that:

- people say they have changed their ideas about later life
- this change has been monitored independently of what they say
- people have changed their patterns of behaviour
- there is an increased potential for people to take up new activities and lead a more active life

A degree of caution has to be exercised in making conclusions and the limitations of the data sources discussed in section 2 need to be considered. The relatively small sample in the TOPS survey, the problem of sensitising the members of the in-depth panel, and the likely self-selection bias in the questionnaire survey need to be borne in mind. However, the different approaches do not provide contrary evidence and, taken together, provide a convincing picture. Given this, then it should be recognised that educational programmes, such as those in the "Third Age" series, can be a powerful tool in effecting personal change. The potential for influencing the quality of life of the older viewers, by prompting new interests and a more active and healthy lifestyle should not be underestimated.

While attitudinal and behavioural changes have been shown, what we are less certain about is the potential impact of this kind of series and the process by which attitudinal and



behavioural change is facilitated. For instance, the same ideas and objectives in a set of programmes with a different approach could have had much less effect. Equally, yet another approach could have resulted in an even greater attitudinal and behavioural change than was shown here. We also need to know more about the process by which people accommodate media images and ideas within their everyday understandings and attitudes. As discussed in Section 9, these represent potentially very fruitful areas of further research. This could provide strategic information for making future programmes even more effective.

## BBC Third Age Programmes Research

### In-depth panel - Initial interview

#### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The research we are doing is on behalf of the BBC who will be showing a series of programmes called "Third Age" this Autumn. These programmes will have a special appeal to people aged 50 years and over. The BBC have asked us to speak to a small number of people in-depth to get their views about the series. Your views are very important, because programme-makers need to know what sort of programmes people want in the future.

As part of the research, we will be asking you to watch some of the "Third Age" programmes. As well as this interview, we will be speaking to you during the series and then finally after the series has finished. For your trouble, there will be a payment to you of £10 for this first interview and then another £20 at the end of the research.

The interview is quite detailed covering the things you like and dislike on television, as well as background information on yourself. Don't be worried by the interview - there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers and they are entirely in confidence.

#### Interview details

Name of  
interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Address/  
location: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time started: \_\_\_\_\_

Time finished: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of  
interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

## Demographics

To start with, we need to know a little about yourself. This will help to build up a picture of the programme viewers.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Employment status: retired \_\_\_\_\_  
full-time employment \_\_\_\_\_  
part-time employment \_\_\_\_\_  
unemployed \_\_\_\_\_  
other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
4. Occupation/previous occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Marital status: married/cohabiting \_\_\_\_\_  
widowed \_\_\_\_\_  
single \_\_\_\_\_  
divorced \_\_\_\_\_
6. If widowed - how long have you been widowed? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Who lives in the household? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Annual income: under 5000 \_\_\_\_\_  
5000-9999 \_\_\_\_\_  
10000-14999 \_\_\_\_\_  
15000 & over \_\_\_\_\_
10. Income sources state pension \_\_\_\_\_  
wages/salary from work \_\_\_\_\_  
private pension \_\_\_\_\_  
company pension \_\_\_\_\_  
savings/investments \_\_\_\_\_  
other - (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
11. Education level \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you have any problems with your health? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 12.1. (If yes) what are they? \_\_\_\_\_
- 12.2. (If yes) do they prevent you from doing things? (probe) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Diary of a typical day**

(Interviewer, pay particular attention to times of: when TV is on, when person watches TV, what place person is in eg, home, shops etc, who person is with)

4.00 am .....

5.00 .....

6.00 .....

7.00 .....

8.00 .....

9.00 .....

10.00 .....

11.00 .....

12.00 pm .....

1.00 .....

2.00 .....

3.00 .....

4.00 .....

5.00 .....

6.00 .....

7.00 .....

8.00 .....

9.00 .....

10.00 .....

11.00 .....

12.00 am .....

1.00 .....

2.00 .....

3.00 .....

## Lifestyle

We also need to build a picture of your lifestyle.

13. What things do you like to do (eg, hobbies, pastimes, sports, etc)

13.1 Can you tell me about your \_\_\_\_\_  
(hobbies, pastimes, sports, etc. **Interviewer**, discuss why the person does these things and what they personally get out of them)

14. Think about how you spend a typical day. Start with when you usually get up.  
(**Interviewer**, probe for times, places, who with - enter details on time sheet)

15. Would you describe yourself as an active person?

YES NO

15.1 If NO, can you explain what you mean when you say you don't consider yourself as an active person? (**Interviewer**, look for evidence of home centredness, and reasons for inactivity such as poor health)

## Self-image

We also need to get a picture of how you see yourself.

16. Could you give a brief description of yourself. Try to keep it as honest, yet accurate as possible.  
(**Interviewer**, encourage the person to get beyond physical descriptions such as hair colour)

17. What do you think your good points are?

18. What things about yourself are you not so happy with?

### Getting older

You are now X years old. In what ways have you changed over the years? Compare yourself now to how you were 10 years ago and explain what changes have occurred.

20. What are the good things about getting a bit older?

21. What are the bad things?

22. What are your hopes and plans for the future?  
(Interviewer, to discuss hopes and plans with participant)

## Images of old age

(Interviewer issues covered may include health and welfare, social, physical, mental, personality changes, relationships, lifestyle and financial changes)

23. Tell me what comes into your mind when you think about an older person  
(Interviewer, press them for about 5 or 6 descriptors)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
24. Take a look at this list of words. Which of the words describe a typical older person.  
You can use as many of these words as you like.  
(Interviewer, stress the word typical)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
25. What words do you think should be on the list, but aren't?

## Self and change

26. What kind of changes would you like to see happening in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
27. What changes would you like to see in your:
  - a) relationships with other people (spouse, children, friends etc)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b) everyday activities (the things you do eg hobbies, interests)?

c) living arrangements?

d) the way you feel about yourself?

28. Is there anything that is stopping you from changing your life?  
(Interviewer, probe as much as you can on barriers to activity)

29. Are there some things you would really like to do which you haven't got around to doing yet? (eg ambitions)

30. Are you the sort of person who helps their friends or local community?

friends	YES	NO
community	YES	NO

30.1 . If YES, what kind of skills, talents, experiences can you offer to help other people?



## The role of television

### Role of television in person's life

31. In what ways is television important in your life?  
(Interviewer, probe for - leisure and relaxation, filling/time alleviating boredom, getting ideas and information, offsetting loneliness)

(Interviewer, if TV is not important then find out why it isn't)

### Attitudes towards television

32. What do you like about watching TV?  
(Interviewer, probe for issues such as - an entertaining way to spend time, fairly boring most of the time, relaxing, stimulating)

33. What do you dislike about watching TV?  
(Interviewer, probe for issues such as - boring, not aimed at people like me, for people with nothing better to do)

### Use of television

34. Do you watch a lot of TV, an average amount or not so much?

A lot

An average amount

Not so much

35. How many hours do you watch in a week?  
(Interviewer, to help the person work this out, perhaps aggregating usual daily figures)
36. Do you usually watch TV alone or with other people?  
(Interviewer, to find out who they watch with and when they watch TV socially eg in the evening)
37. Do you just watch certain programmes or do you watch whatever is on at the time?
38. What other things do you do when you are watching TV? (eg knitting, reading etc)
39. Do you usually watch TV:
- |                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| In the mornings   | YES NO |
| In the afternoons | YES NO |
| In the evenings?  | YES NO |
40. Are there particular times when you particularly like to watch TV?
- YES NO
- 40.1 If YES, can you tell me why it is that you watch at these times?

41. Are there times when you would never watch TV then?

**Programme preferences**

42. What kinds of programmes do you like best (soaps, films, news etc).  
(Interviewer, probe why they like them)

43. What are your favourite programmes? (list 5)

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44. What kinds of programmes do you not like? (soaps, news, etc)  
(Interviewer, probe why they don't like them)

45. Have you seen any programmes which are aimed at the over-50 age group (which ones)?

(Interviewer, note mention of any programmes)

YES NO

45.1 If YES, what did you think about them?

46. What programmes make you switch off?  
(Interviewer, probe why)

### Images of old age on television

Think about an older person or character who you see on TV.

47. Who is it?  
Programme/channel  
Person/character

48. Briefly describe the person (personality as well as physical)

(Interviewer, if interviewee mentions a fictional character ask -)

49. Do you think this character is true to life?

YES NO

- 49.1 If YES, what rings true about them?

- 49.2 If NO, what doesn't ring true about them?

50. Is this person typical of other older people seen on TV?

YES NO

51. So in general, how do you think typical older people on TV are portrayed?

### Morale Scale

I would like to ask a few questions about how you feel nowadays. I will read out some statements and you say whether you agree with them or not.

1. I get more angry then I used to Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
2. I sometimes worry so much that I cannot sleep Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
3. Things keep getting worse as I get older Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
4. I feel lonely Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
5. I see enough of my friends and relatives Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
6. Little things bother me more this year Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
7. I have as much pep as I had last year Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
8. I get upset easily Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
9. I have a lot to be sad about Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
10. Life is hard for me much of the time Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
11. I am as happy nowadays as when I was younger Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
12. I take things hard Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
13. As you get older you are less useful Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
14. How satisfied are you with your life today? Satisfied \_\_\_ Not satisfied \_\_\_
15. I sometimes feel that life isn't worth living Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
16. As you get older, are things better or worse than you thought they would be? Better \_\_\_ Worse \_\_\_

## Checklist

1. Intelligent
2. Family-oriented
3. Lonely
4. Useful
5. Widowed
6. Faded
7. Demanding
8. Deaf
9. Grey-haired
10. Caring
11. Dependent
12. Experienced
13. Awkward
14. Retired
15. Sociable
16. Generous
17. Wrinkled
18. Stay-at-home
19. Intolerant
20. Tired
21. Talkative
22. Living in the past
23. Skilled
24. Grandparents
25. Frail
26. Sprightly
27. Hard-up
28. Confused
29. Helpful
30. In poor health
31. Living alone
32. Patient
33. Cantankerous
34. Contented
35. Slow
36. Wise
37. Unhappy
38. Stuck in a rut
39. Free to do as they like
40. Independent

The Third Age (BBC2, 2.30pm, Thursdays, 21 October to 23 December)

In-depth panel - Second interview

Interviewers, we need as much detail as possible about what the people think about the programmes. So a lot of probing is required. Give people time to think about things and come up with their own ideas. Probe with questions such as; why, what, when, etc.

Each interview should take about an hour.

Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time interviewed started: \_\_\_\_\_

Time completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

1. To start with, I would like to know what you think about **The Third Age** series in general. Could you describe the series as if you were describing it to someone who hadn't seen it?

2. What message do you think **The Third Age** series was trying to get over?

3. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the series, **The Third Age**? Please use the following scale where 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = not sure, 2 = disagree, 1 = disagree strongly and circle the appropriate number to indicate your level of agreement.

In general,

They were interesting	5 4 3 2 1
They were boring	5 4 3 2 1
They were enjoyable	5 4 3 2 1
They were educational	5 4 3 2 1
They covered a wide range of issues	5 4 3 2 1
They made me think more about life in later years	5 4 3 2 1
They gave me good ideas about things to do	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were good quality	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were difficult to understand	5 4 3 2 1
They left we wanting to see more	5 4 3 2 1
I tried to watch every programme in the series	5 4 3 2 1
It worked well as a series	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see another programme for the older person	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see older people enjoying themselves	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see older people being busy and active	5 4 3 2 1
The people featured were typical of their age group	5 4 3 2 1
Programmes aimed at older people are a good idea	5 4 3 2 1

4. I would like to get your views on a number of things related to the programmes:

Pace: Is it low key, too fast, too slow, bitty?

Format: Did you like the way the programme was put together?

Information: Was the information at the right level?

Presentational style: Was it patronising, humorous, condescending etc?

Content: Was it interesting, useful, convincing, difficult etc?

Tone: Telling you how to run your life, widening options etc?



Image of later life: Exciting, dull, positive, negative etc?

5. Was there anything in the programmes that has stuck particularly in your mind?

6. Has **The Third Age** series changed the way you think about life in later years?  
(Circle one number)

YES, a lot	1
YES, a little	2
NO	3

6a. If YES, in what ways have your attitudes towards later life changed?

6b. If NO, why is that?

7. Do you think you have learned anything from watching **The Third Age** programmes?  
(Circle one number)

YES, a lot	1
YES, a little	2
NO	3

7a. If YES, what do you feel you have learnt?

7b. If NO, why is that?

8. Are you likely to do anything as a result of watching the programme(s)? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely 1

YES, possibly 2

NO

8a. If YES, what are you going to do?

8b. If YES or NO, why is that

9. Do you think **The Third Age** programmes were aimed at people like yourself? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely 1

YES, possibly 2

NO

9a. Why is that?

10. Did you identify with anybody in the programmes? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely 1

YES, possibly 2

NO 3

10a. If YES, who and why?

11. In general, did you like or dislike the programmes in **The Third Age** series? (Circle one number)

- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Liked a lot               | 1 |
| Liked a little            | 2 |
| Neither liked or disliked | 3 |
| Disliked a little         | 4 |
| Disliked a lot            | 5 |

11a. Why was that?

12. How would you like to see it improved? Any ideas for the content of future programmes?

BBC Third Age Programmes Research

**In-depth panel - Third interview**

Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time interviewed started: \_\_\_\_\_

Time completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer, most of the questions are repeated from the previous two interviews.

## Lifestyle

1. Have you taken up any new pastimes, hobbies, sports, jobs, voluntary work, or any new ways of spending your time, since we first spoke to you in October/November? If YES, what and why?
  
2. Would you say you go out more now than you did then? If YES, doing what, why, etc?
  
3. Are you thinking about taking up any new activities? If YES, what and why?
  
4. Think about how you spend a typical day. Start with when you usually get up. (Interviewer, probe for times, places, who with - enter details on time sheet)
  
5. Would you describe yourself as an active person?  
  
YES      NO
- 15.1 If NO, can you explain what you mean when you say you don't consider yourself as an active person?  
(Interviewer, look for evidence on home centredness, and reasons for inactivity such as poor health)

## Self-image

We also need to get a picture of how you see yourself.

6. Could you give a brief description of yourself. Try to keep it as honest, yet accurate as possible.  
(Interviewer, encourage the person to get beyond physical descriptions such as hair colour)
7. What do you think your good points are?
8. What things about yourself are you not so happy with?

## Getting older

9. What are the good things about getting a bit older?
10. What are the bad things?
11. What are your hopes and plans for the future?  
(Interviewer, to discuss hopes and plans with participant)

## **Images of old age**

(**Interviewer**, issues covered may include health and welfare, social, physical, mental, personality changes, relationships, lifestyle and financial changes)

12. Tell me what comes into your mind when you think about an older person.  
(**Interviewer**, press them for about 5 or 6 descriptors)

13. Take a look at this list of words. Which of the words describe a typical older person.  
You can use as many of these words as you like.  
(**Interviewer**, stress the word typical)

14. What words do you think should be on the list, but aren't?

15. In general, how do you think older people spend their time?

## **Self and change**

16. What kind of changes would you like to see happening in your life?

17. What changes would you like to see in your:

a) Relationships with other people (spouse, children, friends etc)?

b) Everyday activities (the things you do eg hobbies, interests)?

c) Living arrangements?

d) The way you feel about yourself?

18. Is there anything that is stopping you from changing your life?  
(Interviewer, probe as much as you can on barriers to activity)

19. Are there some things you would really like to do which you haven't got around to doing yet? (eg ambitions)

### Images of old age on TV

Think about an older person or character who you see on TV.

20. Who is it?  
Programme/channel  
Person/character



21. Briefly describe the person (personality as well as physical)

(Interviewer, if interviewee mentions a fictional character ask -)

22. Do you think this character is true to life?

YES NO

22a. If YES, what rings true about them?

22b. If NO, what doesn't ring true about them?

23. Is this person typical of other older people seen on TV?

YES NO

24. So in general, how do you think typical older people on TV are portrayed?

#### About the Third Age series

25. What message do you think **The Third Age** series was trying to get over?

26. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the series, **The Third Age**? Please use the following scale where 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = not sure, 2 = disagree, 1 = disagree strongly and circle the appropriate number to indicate your level of agreement.

In general,

They were interesting	5 4 3 2 1
They were boring	5 4 3 2 1
They were enjoyable	5 4 3 2 1
They were educational	5 4 3 2 1
They covered a wide range of issues	5 4 3 2 1
They made me think more about life in later years	5 4 3 2 1
They gave me good ideas about things to do	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were good quality	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were difficult to understand	5 4 3 2 1
They left me wanting to see more	5 4 3 2 1
I tried to watch every programme in the series	5 4 3 2 1
It worked well as a series	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see another programme for the older person	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see older people enjoying themselves	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see older people being busy and active	5 4 3 2 1
The people featured were typical of their age group	5 4 3 2 1
Programmes aimed at older people are a good idea	5 4 3 2 1

27. Was there anything in the programmes that has particularly stuck in your mind?

28. Has **The Third Age** series changed the way you think about life in later years?  
(Circle one number)

YES, a lot	1
YES, a little	2
NO	3

- 28a. If YES, in what ways have your attitudes towards later life changed?

- 28b. If NO, why is that?

29. Do you think you have learned anything from watching **The Third Age** programmes?  
(Circle one number)

YES, a lot            1  
YES, a little        2  
NO                     3

29a. If YES, what do you feel you have learnt?

29b. If NO, why is that?

30. Are you likely to do anything as a result of watching the programme(s)? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely     1  
YES, possibly        2  
NO                     3

30a. If YES, what are you going to do?

30b. If YES or NO, why is that

31. Do you think **The Third Age** programmes were aimed at people like yourself?  
(Circle one number)

YES, definitely     1  
YES, possibly        2  
NO                     3

31a. Why is that?

32. Did you identify with anybody in the programmes? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely	1
YES, possibly	2
NO	3

32a. If YES, who and why?

33. In general, did you like or dislike the programmes in **The Third Age** series? (Circle one number)

Liked a lot	1
Liked a little	2
Neither liked or disliked	3
Disliked a little	4
Disliked a lot	5

33a. Why was that?

(Interviewer, probe as to why programmes were liked or disliked)

Ploughing back -

Something completely different -

Living it up -

Singles -

Life is for living -

Home is where the heart is -

Dr Feelgood -

Couples -

Rebels with a cause -

Memories -

### **Specific issues**

(Interviewer, these are questions which the BBC have specifically asked us to look at. Could you spend some time "asking around" these questions to get as full a picture as possible).

I would also like you to write a paragraph or two on each of the main issues (in bold), based on what your subjects said.

**ISSUE 1. Is everything shown accessible to all older people?**

Do you think that you have to have money to do the things shown in the Third Age programmes? (**Interviewer**, probe does the interviewee have the resources to do the different activities they have seen?)

Were the programmes mainly for people who are fit and active? (Was there enough in the programmes for older people who are frail or disabled? Is this relevant to the interviewee?)

**ISSUE 2. Separation or integration between the ages?**

Do you think the programmes show enough of younger and older people together?

Do you think programmes specifically for older people should just show older people?

Do you think the Third Age programmes would be of interest to younger people?

ISSUE 3. Is there any bias in the programmes according to gender, class, race, age etc.?

Were the programmes biased in favour of certain sections of society?

Do you think the programmes were mainly for men or mainly for women or both?

The programmes were meant to cater for anybody over the age of 50, but did they just cater for a particular age group? (Interviewer, probe, were the programmes mainly for people who are in their 50s, 60s rather than the "older old"?)

Did the programmes cover people in all parts of Britain (Interviewer, probe, or did it mainly focus on people in particular places, such as the South? Is there a southern bias in the programmes?)

Was there enough in the programmes for people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds?

Did the programmes mainly cater for middle-class or working-class people?

If the interviewee did point to some kind of bias in the programmes - did this put them off?



Programme title \_\_\_\_\_

Channel: BBC2      Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

After you have watched **The Third Age** programme, take a few minutes to think about what you have just seen. Now jot down some notes covering:

What the programme was about

What you liked about it

What you disliked about it

What kind of new ideas it has brought to your attention

Keep these notes and give them to the interviewer on their next visit:

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Contact No \_\_\_\_\_

**TELEVISION OPINION PANEL  
QUESTIONNAIRE REQUEST  
SPECIAL QUESTIONS**

ORIGINATING COMPANY: BBC STATE IF: Regional analysis required  
CONTACT NAME: Kate Mitchell NO  
NATIONAL OR REGIONAL: National Special analysis required  
VIEWPOINT WEEK: 51 YES  
PROGRAMME TITLE: THE THIRD AGE  
CHANNEL: BBC2  
DAY & DATES: Thursdays 21 October - TIME: 2.30pm  
23 December

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1. This weekly series looks at life in the "Third Age" - the period of life from about age 50 to 75. Including this week's programme (Thursday, 23rd December), have you watched any of the ten programmes so far? (Circle one number)

YES 1  
NO 2

If YES, please answer questions 3 onwards  
If NO, please answer question 2 then questions 10a and 10b

2. Why haven't you watched this series? (You may circle more than one number)

Didn't know it was on	1
Can't or don't want to watch television at this time	2
I was watching something on another channel	3
Someone else chose not to watch	4
The title (THIRD AGE) put me off	5
Series wasn't aimed at my age-group	6
I read something about it and didn't think I'd like it	7
The topics covered weren't of interest to me	8
Other reason	9

Now answer questions 10a and 10b.

3. How many of the ten programmes (including this week's) have you watched? (Circle one number)

All ten 1  
Eight or nine 2  
Six or seven 3  
Four or five 4  
Two or three 5  
One 6  
Only a few minutes 7

4. How did you start watching the series? (Circle one number)

I especially chose to watch 1  
Someone else wanted to see it 2  
The TV happened to be on 3  
There was nothing else worth watching 4  
Other reason 5

5. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the series THE THIRD AGE? (Please use the scale where 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = disagree strongly)

Interesting  
Educational  
Boring  
Enjoyable  
Good quality series  
Covered a wide range of issues  
Confusing  
Left me wanting to see more  
I'm trying to watch every programme in the series

- b) The Third Age series made me think more about life in later years  
Gave me some good ideas about things to do  
I liked seeing older people being busy and active  
I liked seeing older people enjoying themselves  
I thought the people featured were typical of their age group  
It was patronising  
It's good to have some programmes made specially for older people  
I'd like to watch more programmes made specially for older people

- 6a. Has watching the THIRD AGE series changed the way you think about life in the later years? (Circle one number)

YES 1  
NO/DON'T THINK SO 2

If YES, please answer question 6b  
If NO, please go to question 7

6b. In what ways has watching it changed how you think about life in the later years? (Write in your answer)

7a. Are you likely to do anything as a result of watching the programmes? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely 1

YES, possibility 2

NO 3

If definitely or possibly "YES", please answer question 7b

If "NO", please go to question 8

7b. What are you likely to do as a result of watching the programmes? (Write in your answer)

8. What (if anything) do you particularly like about these programmes? (Write in your answer)

9. What (if anything) do you particularly dislike about these programmes? (Write in your answer)

10a. How much do you agree or disagree with descriptions of older people?  
(Please use the scale where 5 = agree strongly, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = disagree strongly)

54321

a) In general, older people tend to be ...

Wise  
Lonely  
Frail  
Caring  
Cantankerous  
In poor health  
Intelligent  
Tired  
Active  
Boring

b) In general, older people tend to be ...

Unhappy  
Generous  
Intolerant  
A burden on their family  
Have interesting lives  
A burden on society  
Sociable  
Unable to do much  
Skilled  
Happy with their life

**The Third Age (BBC2, 2.30pm, Thursdays, 21st October to 23rd December)**

Dear Sir/Madam

The BBC has asked the University of Liverpool to undertake some research on viewers' opinions about the **Third Age** series of programmes. Your views are important, because programme-makers need to know whether they are making programmes that are interesting, informative and enjoyable. This information is particularly valuable when it comes to deciding what programmes to make in the future.

It would be very helpful if you could spend a few minutes completing the attached questionnaire. May I stress that these questionnaires are entirely in confidence and will not be linked to your name in any way.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the prepaid envelope as soon as possible, or before 23rd December 1993.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Sixsmith, PhD

**The Third Age (BBC2, 2.30pm, Thursdays, 21st October to 23rd December)**

Please answer all the questions by putting a circle around the number next to your answer. Some of the questions also provide some space in which to write your comments.

- 1 This ten-part series looked at life in **The Third Age**, the period of life from about age 50 to 75. Did you watch any of it? (Circle one number)

YES (please answer question 2 onwards) 1  
NO (please go to question 12) 2

- 2 (Only answer questions 2 to 11 if you said YES to question 1) About how many of the **Third Age** programmes have you watched? (Circle one number)

1 1  
2 to 5 2  
6 to 9 3  
all 10 4

- 3 Did you watch the programme(s) alone or with someone else? (Circle one number)

Alone 1  
With someone else 2

- 4 Which of the following reasons indicate why you chose to watch the programme(s)? (Circle one reason)

Especially chose to watch 1  
Someone else chose to watch 2  
They looked interesting 3  
The TV happened to be on 4  
Nothing else worth watching 5  
Don't know 6

- 5 How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the series, **THE THIRD AGE**? Please use the following scale where 5=agree strongly, 4=agree, 3=not sure, 2=disagree, 1=disagree strongly and circle the appropriate number to indicate your level of agreement.

They were interesting	5 4 3 2 1
They were boring	5 4 3 2 1
They were enjoyable	5 4 3 2 1
They were educational	5 4 3 2 1
They covered a wide range of issues	5 4 3 2 1
They made me think more about life in later years	5 4 3 2 1
They gave me good ideas about things to do	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were good quality	5 4 3 2 1
The programmes were difficult to understand	5 4 3 2 1
They left me wanting to see more	5 4 3 2 1
I tried to watch every programme in the series	5 4 3 2 1
It worked well as a series	5 4 3 2 1
I'd like to see another series for the older person	5 4 3 2 1
I liked to see older people enjoying themselves	5 4 3 2 1
I liked to see older people being busy and active	5 4 3 2 1
The people featured were typical of their age group	5 4 3 2 1
Programmes aimed at older people are a good idea	5 4 3 2 1

6 Has the **Third Age** series changed the way you think about life in later years? (Circle one number)

YES, a lot (go on to question 6a) 1

YES, a little (go on to question 6a) 2

NO (go on to question 7) 3

6a Answer this question if you said YES, A LOT or YES, A LITTLE in question 6)  
In what ways have your attitudes towards later life changed? (Write in your answer)

7 Do you think you have learned anything from watching the **Third Age** programmes? (Circle one number)

YES, a lot (go on to question 7a) 1

YES, a little (go on to question 7a) 2

NO (go on to question 8) 3

7a (Answer this question if you said YES, A LOT or YES, A LITTLE in question 7)  
What do you feel you have learned? (Write in your answer)

8 Are you likely to do anything as a result of watching the programme(s)? (Circle one number)

YES, definitely (go on to question 8a) 1

YES, possibly (go on to question 8a) 2

NO (go on to question 9) 3

8a (Answer this question if you said YES, DEFINITELY or YES, POSSIBLY in question 8)

What are you likely to do? (Write in your answer)

9 Do you think the **Third Age** programmes were aimed at people in your age group?

YES, definitely 1

YES, possibly 2

NO, aimed at people younger than me 3

NO, aimed at people older than me 4

UNSURE 5



10 In general, did you like or dislike the programmes in the **Third Age** series (Circle one number)

- liked a lot 1
- liked a little 2
- neither liked or disliked 3
- disliked a little 4
- disliked a lot 5

11 Did you send for the **Third Age** magazine which accompanies the programme? (Circle one number)

- YES (go on to question 11a) 1
- NO (go on to question 12) 2

11a (Answer this question if you answered YES in question 11)

What did you think of the **Third Age Magazine**? (Circle one or more numbers)

- Useful 1
- Boring 2
- Informative 3
- Interesting 4
- Irrelevant 5
- Entertaining 6
- Stimulating 7

#### About television in general

12 In what ways is television important in your life? (Circle one or more numbers)

- leisure and relaxation 1
- filling time/alleviating boredom 2
- getting ideas and information 3
- relieving loneliness 4
- entertainment 5
- television is not important 6
- Other 7

13 About how many hours do you watch television in an average day? (Circle one number)

- less than 2 hours 1
- 2 or 3 hours 2
- 4 or 5 hours 3
- 6 hours or more 4

14 What kinds of programmes do you like? (Circle one or more numbers)

- soaps 1
- quizzes and game shows 2
- feature films 3
- plays/drama 4
- news 5
- documentaries 6
- current affairs 7
- special interest 8
- chat shows 9

sports	10
other	11

15 Please think about an older person or character who you have seen on TV. (Write in your answer)

who is the person/character? \_\_\_\_\_

what programme is he/she in? \_\_\_\_\_

channel(if known) \_\_\_\_\_

15a Which of the following words best describe this person/character? (Circle one or more numbers)

lonely	2
frail	4
a burden on others	14
sociable	12
cantankerous	6
generous	9
happy with their life	16
wise	1
in poor health	7
tired	8
active	10
caring	5
intolerant	11
ineffective	13
intelligent	3
skilled	15

### About yourself

We also need to know a little about yourself. This will help to build up a picture of who watches the **Third Age** series.

16 Age

under 55	1
55-64	2
65-74	3
75 or over	4

17 Sex

male	1
female	2

18 Employment status

retired	1
full-time employment	2
part-time employed	3

unemployed	4
other	5

19 Occupation/Previous occupation of head of household (Please write in)

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20 Marital status

married/cohabiting	1
widowed	2
single	3
divorced	4

21 Who lives in your household?

live alone	1
live with husband/wife	2
live with others	3

22 Do you have any grandchildren?

YES	1
NO	2

23 Annual income

under 5000	1
5000-9999	2
10000-14999	3
15000 and over	4

24 Do you have any problems with your health?

YES (answer question 24a)	1
NO (go to question 25)	2

24a (Answer this question if you answered YES in question 25)  
Do your health problems stop you from doing things?

NO	1
YES a little	2
YES a lot	3

25 What is your postcode? (please write in)  
(If you do not know your postcode, please write in your nearest town/city)

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26 To which of the following groups do you feel you belong?

White	1
Black, Caribbean	2
Black, African	3
Indian	4
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	7
Other	8

27 Would you describe yourself as an active person? (Circle one number)

YES, very active	1
Fairly active	2
Not very active	3

28 Here are some questions about how you feel about life. (Circle one number according to whether you agree or disagree with each statement)

28a	I have plenty of things to do	yes	1	no	2
28b	I see enough of other people	yes	1	no	2
28c	I sometimes get bored	yes	2	no	1
28d	I feel happy in myself	yes	1	no	2
28e	I sometimes feel lonely	yes	2	no	1
28f	The home I live in suits my needs	yes	1	no	2
28g	I get out and about enough	yes	1	no	2
28h	I have a lot to be sad about	yes	2	no	1

29 In general, I am satisfied with life? (Circle one number)

satisfied	1
fairly satisfied	2
not satisfied	3

30 Would you like to see some changes happening in your life?

YES (answer question 30a)	1
NO (go to question 31)	2

30a (Answer this question if you said YES in question 30)

What changes would you like to see? (Write in your answer)

31 Finally, think about older people in general. Which of the following words best describe a typical older person. (Circle one or more numbers) (Please do not refer to any other question in this questionnaire)

wise	1
lonely	2
intelligent	3
frail	4
caring	5
cantankerous	6
in poor health	7
tired	8
generous	9
active	10
intolerant	11
sociable	12
ineffective	13
a burden on others	14
skilled	15
happy with their life	16