

Reducing Ageism: Synergies in Research & Policy

Session: Ageism, media and digital technology

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Ageism in the Media

Policy Measures to Reduce Stereotypical Representations of Older People

Wenqian Xu

wenqian.xu@liu.se

Twitter @xu_wenqian

Laura Allen

laura.allen@biu.ac.il

Twitter @LauraDAllen2

Ageism in the media

- Older people are stereotypically portrayed in the media at two extremes of a spectrum, either the healthy and happy retiree, or the frail and sick older person in need of care.
- Implied “dependence” and “otherness” of older adults as one group
(Fealy et al., 2012; Koskinen et al., 2014)
- Focus on health or lack of health (Rozanova, 2006; Funk et al., 2020)
- **Visual ageism** refers to the social practice of visually underrepresenting older people* or misrepresenting them in a prejudiced way (Loos & Ivan, 2018).



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Impacts of Ageism in the media

- Individuals exposed to stereotypical portrayals could develop a distorted view of the realities of older people and later life.
- The negative portrayals could harmfully influence older people's self-esteem as well as younger people's perceptions of ageing processes.

Reducing ageism in the media

We call for more authentic, balanced, diverse and thoughtful portrayals of older people in the media, as well as seeking accountability of content producers as a critical way of reducing the portrayals of older people that may lead to ageism.

Five policy measures are suggested for reducing ageism in the process of generating media content (digital and print) about older people and later life.

Ageism in the Media

Policy Measures to Reduce Stereotypical Representations of Older People in Long-Term Care

Authors

Wenqian Xu, Laura D. Allen

1) **Include a heterogeneous ageing experience in media portrayals**

- Older people can directly participate in creating media agendas, generating portrayals of ageing experiences, and evaluating images.
- It is imperative to ensure the inclusion of diverse older persons' authentic voices and to construct ageing experiences from a first-person perspective, as this can help ageing services and stakeholders with creating alternative portrayals of older people and ageing.
- In long-term care: we encourage the institutions to recognise the potential of residents, present their coherent life stories, as well as highlight heterogeneity in later life in terms of personal goals, interests, hobbies and feelings.

2) Reduce social stigmas surrounding ageing & later life

- Content producers should be sensitive to the discourse of old age in the given society when they report on issues relating to later life.
- Including and focusing on the individuals' lived experiences, while being conscious of the harmful effects of stereotypically portraying older people, will promote an authentic image of later life and the ageing experience.

3) Provide training for media professionals working around ageing and long-term care

- There is a need to offer professional training for different media professionals (e.g., journalists, visual designers, advertisers) in terms of promoting inclusive portrayals of older people.
- It is also crucial to train media professionals to improve their communication with older people and residents in long-term care.

4) Encourage education in ageism and construct new images of later life and of long-term care

- Governments and authorities should allocate financial resources to support education in ageism and construct newer images of old age in the media, including experiences of residential long-term care.

5) Support providers of care to tackle the privacy issue of residents in the media

- Providers of care should understand the importance of not overstepping residents in regard to their representation in the media, but rather promoting residents' experiences of ageing and care.
- The media production process should respect individual residents' preferences and support their understanding of the process and consent.
- Collaborating with media professionals and supporting their access to speaking with residents without oversight or interference can promote a more authentic image of ageing, including the positive outcomes of care.