

Journal #2:

Affects of Media on the Elderly

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Invite to World of Aging

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Youthfulness is a word that is not commonly used but everyone knows what it means. Many elderly people tell stories about their youth, often to their grandchildren in hopes of being reconnected back to those thoughts, memories and "good times." Who says that your older years can be some of the best years of your life? Is it just American culture that looks down upon elderly people or is it all cultures?

All around us there is media shaping our lives from the television shows we watch to the magazines we read, and even to the birthday cards we buy. Yet, the group of people most falsely depicted by media is often the elderly. Ageism, similarly to racism is when a group of people are stereotyped or discriminated against, in this case elderly people usually 65 years and older. For example, today I was looking at birthday cards for elderly people in the bookstore and every single card was trying to be entertaining or witty. Most cards poked fun at symptoms of aging such as forgetfulness or failing eyesight. Others portrayed the elderly as cranky. Some may find it funny to see a card mocking old age; however, some may find it offensive. One card that stood out to me pictured a cartoon drawing of an elderly man who was over weight, holding a cane, with wrinkles, a large nose, large ears, and having only two teeth holding a piece of birthday cake. The caption on the outside of the card read "I'm going to let you in on a little secret..." When you open the card it reads "Old people aren't cranky...we're just pissed off about getting old. Welcome to the club. Happy Birthday." To me this is offensive and completely unnecessary portraying the elderly as being cranky. These birthday cards depicting elderly people all used the stereotypical elderly person. The images showed short, over weight, males or females with white hair, wrinkly skin, less mobile, and with less intelligence. Not once was there a card with an elderly African-American male or

female or an elderly person with long hair, nice smooth skin of average weight and active. All in all, I get what the card companies are trying to do with all the humor to go along with the elderly birthday cards; yet, I think it just makes the attitude towards growing old that much worse.

How much television do you watch a day? If you do not think it shapes your life and attitudes towards certain groups of people you are mistaken. Television is arguably one of the most influential day to day activities that humans partake in. When you sit down to watch a show do you think of depiction of elderly people within that show? Many television shows that I watch such as, Modern Family, Everybody Loves Raymond, Breaking Bad, and Law in Order: Special Victims Unit all have elderly characters. In Modern Family and Everybody Loves Raymond the elderly people are parents to many children and are portrayed in a very stereotypical way as overbearing and having trouble with hearing and being cranky. As for Breaking Bad and Law in Order: Special Victims Unit both of the elderly characters are both highly regarded and honored in their line of work and break the stereotype of an elderly person. In many television shows elderly characters are seen as the leaders, for example in Law in Order: Special Victims Unit the Police Captain of the unit is elderly and everyone takes orders from him. He is respected in his position and looked up to by the other members of the police department. However, the images used to portray these elderly characters do follow the stereotype of balding males or white haired females with wrinkles. All of the characters in these four shows are white able males, except of the mother in Everybody Loves Raymond who is a white able female.

While you are watching these television shows you often get annoyed when commercials come on every five minutes. However, have you ever sat and actually paid attention to what these commercials are promoting and how they are promoting it? What you may not realize is that the elderly does not seem to be a big target market for television commercials. I recently discovered that only about two out of every ten commercials, or as few as 20% of the commercials when I was watching television had an elderly man or woman, and out of those maybe one is an African-American. In many commercials featuring an elderly actor the product being sold was some sort of medication, such as products to relieve arthritis or heart conditions. Commercials geared towards the elderly seemed to have a more serious tone compared to other commercials.

When you are waiting at the doctor's office, you might pick up a magazine and begin to skim the pages looking for an interesting article. What you may not realize is depending on which magazine you pick up, the diversity of ages tends to vary. For example, in Sports Illustrated about 95 percent of the images were of younger adults, usually athletes or coaches. Similarly, People Magazine mostly had images of younger adults. All advertisements except one contained images of young attractive males or females. The one advertisement containing an elderly woman was for menopause medication. The image was of a gray haired female with wrinkles. Similarly, Redbook only contained one advertisement involving an elderly couple. This advertisement was different from the one in People Magazine because the people were portrayed a bit differently. Although the ad was for Enbrel to help stop joint pain, the couple was portrayed as smiling and having fun and being an active couple. The woman had brown hair as opposed to gray hair although the male was bald. On the other hand, Rolling Stone

magazine was split with about half of the images of young adults and the other half elderly adults. Many of the advertisements in the issue of Rolling Stone I looked at were of elderly people. This particular issue was focusing on the new Pope and seemed to be geared towards an elderly audience.

The western society we live in views death as unnatural and feared. However, in eastern societies death is just a part of life. In eastern societies many cultures believe in reincarnation, which is when after death you are reborn into another form, making the process not feared as it is in this society. Yet, in western societies many cultures do not believe in reincarnation, making death greatly feared thus making aging a difficult time in life. The media can be highly ageist and stereotypical. In many aspects of media the elderly are portrayed as the stereotypical elderly male or female. Also, when ageing is depicted in a positive manner, the focus is often to push anti-aging products. Media influences our day to day life, and in today's society youth and beauty are portrayed as being beyond important. A person's youthful appearance is more important than their character or their personality. Lastly, elderly are greatly affected by the media, because when elderly are falsely depicted in media it not only affects the way they behave but also the way others behave towards them.

T.V shows

- Modern Family
- How I Meet Your Mother
- Dexter
- Law and Order: Special Victims Unit
- Breaking Bad
- Everybody Loves Raymond

Commercials

- CHASE Sapphire Preferred (credit card)
- Subway (Fritos Chicken Enchilada)
- Kay jewelers (open heart necklace)
- Direct TV
- TaxAct (online taxes)
- Wendy's (Ciabatta new bacon cheese burger)
- Celebrex (arthritis medication)
- Eatable arrangements
- Dulcolax (constipation)
- Ebates (online shopping)
- Fridays (New entrees)
- T-moblie (ETF)
- eHarmony
- Value.com (pass it on)
- Craft Mac and Cheese
- Gazelle (money for phones)
- Tempur-pedic
- Burger king (spicy chicken sandwich)
- Ancestry.com (ancestry DNA)
- HH.gregg (appliances)

Magazines

- People
- Sports Illustrated
- Redbook
- Time
- Rolling Stone