

Grumpy old men analysis from a psychological point essay examples

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Grumpy Old Men is a 1993 American film that revolves around the life and times of two childhood friends, Gustafson and Goldman, in their old age. The cast is made up of Jack Lemmon (acting as John Gustafson), Walter Matthau (acting as Max Goldman), Ann Margaret (acting as Ariel Truax Gustafson), Burgess Meredith (acting as John Sr.), Darryl Hannah (acting as Melanie), Kevin Pollak (acting as Jacob), Ossie Davis (acting as Chuck) and Buck Henry (acting as Elliott Snyder). As the title suggests, the film misrepresents the elderly as people who are always grumpy, easily irritated and stubborn. In addition, the film cements the stereotypes that have been perpetuated about the elderly over the years through the popular media.

The 'grumpy old man' phenomenon is not something new. The media has particularly been a culprit when it comes to promoting negative perceptions about the elderly people. Given that they have the power to influence people's perception about others and their mannerisms, the media has particularly spread the notion that old people are always sulking, ugly and dependent. In the Grumpy Old Men, for instance, the portrayal of the elderly as villains is quite evident. In the film, the elderly are portrayed as people who do not do their share, and as people who need a strong pyramid system in order to support them in their old age. In this case, Jacob and Melanie are the ones who serve the purpose of taking care of their parents. Because of the way people are socialized, the expectation is that the elderly are taken care of by children.

The villain nature of the old people also comes out when John Sr. refers to the feuds between his son and Max childish. By the virtue of his age, John Sr. thinks that what John and Max are engaged in is not something to be done

by people of their age. While, this may partly be true, it also reveals a war between generations. On one hand, the older generation thinks that the young generations are taking part in useless activities while, on the other hand, the young generation thinks that the old generation is still trapped into the old way of life and doing things. Another factor about the negative portrayal of the old people in the film comes out in the manner in which they are portrayed as poor people. Their homes and the towns in which Max and John live are full of poverty. This is exaggerated by the fact that they are both widowed, and they live alone most of the times, something which fits the expectations of the wider community; the elderly are always widowed. The attempt to bring out comical nature of the characters also smacks of stereotyping. That attempt does not come out clearly, and this ends up showing the characters as foolish and stubborn people. For example, Max embarrasses himself when he tries to drive a truck along the shores of a lake that is full of people. The fact that he almost runs over people, but shows no remorse about the matter is an evident to portray the stereotypic stubborn nature of the old people.

Moreover, there is an attempt, on the part of the film producers, to show the elderly as individuals who are sexless. Max, for example, does not think highly of a certain girl in the neighborhood. He thinks that the girl is a lesbian and discourages Jacob from pursuing her. In addition, both John and Max are widowed, something which further explicates the portrayal of old people as sexless. There is also an attempt to show the characters as sickly people nearing death. This is particularly evident in the case of John Sr., who is ninety-four years of age. Again, the film producers do not miss the chance to

portray the characters as ugly and nostalgic. Physical appearance elongates the theme of stereotyping within the movie and matches the characters with their roles.

Infantilization is another aspect that is evident in the film. For example, despite being friends, Gustafson and Goldman fight endlessly over mundane issues. To a large extent, their behaviors appear childish. Case in point is the portrayal of child-like pranks that the two neighbors play on each other. Max, for instance, goes to his house and changes the channel on John's television using a universal remote through the window. Although this provides an element of comic relief, it is not something that is expected of people in that age group. In revenge, John throws dead fish inside Max's trucks. The two men also engage in a trivial competition, fighting for the attention of a new neighbor by the name Ariel. When Max finds out that Ariel, the new neighbor, spends more time with John, he drives John's truck into a frozen lake and sinks it. The incident leads to an exchange of words between the two.

However, the fact that John Sr. has the wisdom to know that the behavior shown by his son and his friend Max is not a representation of all the old people is a positive thing for the elderly people and it redeems their image in the film.

Nonetheless, the activities that the two (John and Max) engage in are viewed by the rest of the society as child-like. For example, in the scene where Max drives the truck through a stretch full of people, no one wants to get involved with an old and inflexible grumpy. The fact that Max nearly killed people while doing his act for sport means that he is not mature enough. Through these actions, the command and respect given to the old people because of

their wisdom seems to be lacking. However, there seems to be a contradiction when the film seems to attack ageism in some scenes. For example, John senior, who is ninety four years of age and the oldest character in the film, castigates the behavior shown by his son (John) and his friend (Max). He sees the constant fights between the two as behavior that is peculiar to the two of them only, but not something that can be generalized to the whole society. Nonetheless, the part that portrays the negative light of old people outdoes the part that portrays old people in positive light.

For example, diversity is lacking in the film. There is no balance between the ages of characters. On one side, there is a character who is almost hitting a century (John Sr.), and other characters in their mid age, while, on the other hand, there is no character below the age of thirty. The fact there is no one under thirty in the film smacks of ageism. Although this group may not form part of the primary audience targeted by the movie producers and directors, it undermines the diversity that would be expected in a normal society. The society consists of people from different age groups, and they live with each other in harmony. However, Grumpy Old Men has a limited representation of the different age groups in the society.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the differences on the portrayal of men and women in the film are subtle and not exaggerated as someone would expect of a film that is full of stereotyping and ageism. Female and male characters are displayed in almost the same manner. However, it is not funny at all when the film tries hard to show a comical side of the old people in an insensitive manner; for example, when Max is having a conversation about the presumed lesbian girl. Nevertheless, someone watching the movie

for the first time would expect the film to show the gloomy side of the elderly and all that. The best means to gauge the response of the people on the film is by watching their concentration span.

When it comes to the title of the movie, it is characteristic in developing the stereotypes about the old people. The name ' Grumpy Old Men' inspires no confidence, at all. It implies that the old people are always sulking and stern-faced. The connotation may appear innocent, but it helps to shape the image of desperate old people. Without realizing it, the title creates an ageist view of the old people. The fact that it brings out the negative side about the old people has an immense impact on the society at large. The society tends to isolate old people because of the very same notions that the film seems to cement. In psychology, ageism refers to the discrimination of people on the basis of their age.

The popular media embeds certain notion about particular groups of people. The fact that the film portrays old people in a bad light may have a long-lasting impact on the minds of young people. Consequently, someone may start bullying the old people or talking negatively about them because of the message they receive from the film.

Socialization molds people's lives through various ways. It shapes expectations and exposes people to the normative behaviors acceptable within the culture. Media happens to be one of the things that play an important role in socialization. Through constant repetition of messages - no matter whether it is true or false - people forms perceptions that they use in their interaction with others. Given this background, it is highly possible for people to bring their predispositions into the movie situation. The context of

the message is also another thing to consider when determining the manner in which a specific socialization attribute influences

Physical location of the film also matters. In the case of Grumpy Old Men, the setting mirrors the stereotypes that people hear about the old people. It is an isolated place, with few people and without the trappings of the modern cities; Its sets a background of loneliness.

In conclusion, Grumpy Old Men is a film that portrays the stereotypes about old people still prevalent in the society. From the title of the film, to the characters, and their roles, it is evident that the media contributes immensely to the negative perception of old people. When these perceptions are embedded into people's minds the result is seclusion of particular groups of people.

References

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