

Ageism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This informal experiment intends to describe and document negative connotations reflected in popular culture through multimedia and measuring how long it takes for five negative remarks or innuendos to be observed within a given time frame. The dependent variable is the number of negative connotations, while the independent variable is the media through which the negative comments on aging are presented. Hypothesis #1 (H1) is predicated on the time slot of television programming. Television targeting a specific demographic would effect the amount of time for the negative comments to be observed.

The time slot of programming would result in a difference in observable negative connotations toward aging, with Sunday evening programming having much more in comparison to Saturday morning programs. The null hypothesis (H0) is no observable difference. Since the study is informal, only the two variables will be considered, however the context in which the comments were encountered will be discussed in relation to time and media, in this case, over the air digital television programming. Introduction Robert N. Butler (1969) first coined the term age-ism, described as the “ultimate prejudice” (Angus & Reeve, 2006).

Ageism constitutes negative attitudes and behaviors directed at a specific age group. Butler (1969) described it as an “uneasiness” or “distaste” for growing old. The concept of “growing old” has been associated with decline and disability. People tend to view the aging population negatively. Ageism is a product of society and stems from deep rooted beliefs influenced by social, political and economic factors. Through multimedia and advertisement an image of perfection is introduced to members of a capitalistic society

whereby standards are established for what is considered normal and beautiful.

Youth is worshiped in Western culture and its prevalence associated with power and acceptance (Saucier, 2004). The media, magazines, and advertisements are partially responsible for this obsession as they emphasize youthful looking skin, healthy hair, and muscular or toned bodies. Visible signs of aging like wrinkles, gray hair, and weight gain do not support these values. As a result, the aging population is viewed as less adequate and aging women feel especially compelled to remain young and beautiful. Saucier (2004) attributes this finding to the under representation of older women on television.

In addition to youth and beauty, other cultural values may bolster ageism and further alienate older people from society. Capitalism has led to values emphasizing workforce participation, financial and economic contributions to society, income capacity, job status, economic productivity, and work related performance (Angus & Reeve, 2006). Mandatory retirement policies has forced older people out of the workforce and without work, they are generating less income. They are more likely to be viewed as lazy and unproductive.

The aging process is accompanied by physical and psychological changes which may result in alteration of role expectations and ability (Saucier, 2004). Problems in adjustment are often aggravated among minority elderly populations due to their lower socioeconomic status and the effects of poverty and discrimination (Angus & Reeve, 2006). Through stigmatization and stereotyping a barrier is constructed between older people and the rest

of society resulting in the reinforcement of ageism. Methods A random selection of television shows were observed based on the time slot and therefore the demographic being targeted by the television networks.

Saturday morning and Sunday evening programming were compared. Since Saturday morning television networks typically target a young audience, ages 18 and younger, the programs' content and advertisements are definitely intended for a very young audience. On the other hand, television programming and advertisement on a Sunday evening is intended for a mature audience. This informal experiment sought to determine whether five negative comments could be observed regarding aging, geriatrics or gerontology in any given time period.

For (H1), a four hour time frame was used. Results Hypothesis #1: Saturday morning television programming resulted in only one negative comment. Randomly selected through "channel surfing" and on a Spanish television network a "paid programming" or "infomercial" was selling a product called Extra Mega Prosta Max, a natural prostate treatment. The comment in context and translated as follows:

"This product alleviates the problems which arise with old age and sexual dysfunction and other symptoms such as urination and the possibility of prostate cancer. In typical infomercial style, it utilized a fear mechanism and personal comments by users who had found it to be miraculous. This was the only negative comment within a randomization of television programming and networks on Saturday, April 23rd, 2011 from 7 am to 11 am. In stark contrast, during the Sunday evening programming on April 24th, 2011 from 6 pm to 10 pm, seven negative comments were observed just after forty-five

minutes. American Dad is an animated one half hour program which chronicles the life of the protagonist, who is an employee with the CIA.

This episode centered upon his relationship with his aging mother who wanted to be romantically involved but her suitors would leave her after the third date. The mother states to her son, (1) " Maybe, because I am old and alone, I am unlovable! " The daughter in law says, " No, that is not true! " and the protagonist responds, (2) " Yes it is, she is all dried up! " After American Dad, on the same network aired Family Guy. In this episode, when Brian, the family dog, is arrested for drunk driving, he's forced to do community service in the " Outreach to the Elderly Program," which consists of helping Pearl, an agoraphobic, bitter woman.

The family is having dinner together and Brian says, (3) " I gotta take care of some old woman who hasn't been out of her house in thirty years... (4) I guess taking care of this old woman will be just like baby sitting, only with bigger diapers. " The woman is portrayed as cantankerous, which upsets Brian to the point he shouts, " That's it! I've had it with you, (5) you old hag! (6) You are just a miserable, dried up shut in, trying to make everyone feel as bad as you do! (7) Why don't you do everyone a favor and drop dead! "

Discussion

The null hypothesis was rejected and (H1), regarding time slot of programming, was valid. Again, Hypothesis #1 stated: the time slot of programming would result in a difference in observable negative connotations toward aging, with Sunday evening programming having much more in comparison to Saturday morning programs. Chi Square statistical analysis was used to reject the null hypothesis. The formula is as follows: χ^2

= $(O - E)^2 / E$. Calculate the chi square statistic χ^2 by completing the following steps: 1.

For each observed number subtract the corresponding expected number ($O - E$). 2. Square the difference [$(O - E)^2$]. 3. Divide the squares obtained by the expected number [$(O - E)^2 / E$]. 4. Sum all the values for $(O - E)^2 / E$. This is the chi square statistic. (H1) has two categories, as you may recall, Saturday morning (Category 1) and Sunday evening (Category 2) over the air (antennae, as opposed to cable or satellite) digital programming. When a comparison is made between one sample and another, a simple rule is that the degrees of freedom equal (number of columns minus one) x (number of rows minus one) not counting the totals for rows or columns.

For our data this gives $(2-1) \times (2-1) = 1$, so the degrees of freedom will be 1. The following table represents the calculations: The Chi Square statistic is $\chi^2 = 4.0$ and the predetermined alpha level of significance is 0.05, and the degrees of freedom is $df = 1$. Entering the Chi Square distribution table with 1 degree of freedom and reading along the row we find our value of $\chi^2 = 4.0$ exceeds the critical value in the table for a 0.05 probability level. Since our χ^2 statistic 4.0 exceeded the critical value for 0.05 probability level of 3.84 we can reject the null hypothesis that the observed values would be no different from expected values. Chi Square distribution table: Conclusion Why is aging perceived in such a negative way in American society's reflection in popular culture and the media? The stereotyping and stigmatization is ubiquitous in Western culture, so much that it goes unnoticed until a concerted effort is made to document the negative comments used to describe an older generation who should be admired for

their contributions to our successes as opposed to being marginalized and oppressed.

In a capitalistic society youth is worshiped and an obsessive emphasis is placed on health and fitness, beauty, looking young, and an endless accumulation of wealth. In an individualistic society, the elderly are marginalized and seen as a burden to the younger generation, who often place them in "nursing" homes to live out their last days, instead, as is often the case in collective societies, living with their families who take care of and support the older generation. Aging and death are seen as a curse or an illness in need of a cure instead of the natural order of the universe in which we live.

Some estimate that perhaps 90% or even 95% of all species that have ever existed on the face of the earth are now extinct (Benton, 2003). In a society which fears illness and death, a constant push for medical breakthroughs and technology as the savior is readily apparent with a goal of the elimination of disease and impairments of major life activities. Dominant society strives for a world without the aging and a world without diseases. Admirable from a purely philosophical point, this elimination of diseases like cancer, certainly, but society can never eliminate the aging process. A world without illness, a world without aging, a world without death appears to be unnatural; yet, society, particularly American, fears death, dying, illness, old age, and disability.