

Ageism and Media in Saskatchewan

Introduction

Social isolation is a social and public health problem that affects people of all ages, especially older adults in industrialized countries (Miyawaki 2015). Older adults are vulnerable to stressful life changes such as loss of a spouse, serious health problems, and decreasing physical mobility, and impacts of social isolation are multiplied by these factors (Cornwell and Waite 2009). These impacts negatively affect well-being leading to depression, decreased access to nutritious food, physical illness, and early death (Wilson, Harris, Hollis, and Mohankuman 2010). As our population ages, the number of older adults living with the negative health effects of social isolation increases leading to strain on individuals, their families, and the health care system (Nicholson 2012). Older adults need access to services and programs that facilitate social interaction and sustain good health, especially as this population grows and remains vulnerable to isolation (Graham, Scharlach, and Price Wolf 2014).

In a collective effort to reduce social isolation in older adults, several groups in Saskatchewan have come together, with the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program. Members of the collective include: the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan, Canadian Red Cross, Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU), and Saskatchewan Seniors mechanism (SSM). The goal of the collective is to reduce social isolation of older adults in southern and central Saskatchewan. In addition, the collective seeks to increase access to and availability of supports, participation in activities, maintenance of social networks, and the value ascribed to older adults by the larger society. As part of this collective effort, SSM is spearheading the 'Media and Ageism' project. Positive perceptions tend to encourage people to maintain connections with others, to be as active as their physical condition allows and, thus, to lessen chances for being isolated. The Media and Ageism project is designed to do research through a period of media monitoring in 2017. Data gathered will be used in 2017-2018 to inform and influence journalists, media outlets and general public. A second stage of media monitoring will take place in 2019.

Society depends on media for their news, for information, and for an accurate depiction of current events. As such, the media has an obligation to present fair and unbiased depictions of the social world and its inhabitants. In terms of representing older adults as a group, the media often falls short in its duty to be fair and unbiased by portraying older adults in stereotypical or limiting and simplified ways. This first phase of the project seeks to uncover how older adults are portrayed in Saskatchewan media, television, radio, and newspapers, and to provide guidance in challenging ageist stereotypes in all media. In addition, this project also allows space for individuals, including older adults, to explore how they view the aging process and how media's depiction of older adults affects their perceptions. Importantly, participants reveal their interpretations of media representations of older adults, offering a glimpse into how individuals process messages delivered by media. Ageism in the media is a growing concern as the global population ages, and this project adds to the existing literature that calls for recognition of this concern and its effects on older adults.

Ageism and Media in Saskatchewan

Literature Review

By the year 2050, it is predicted that the number of older adults will exceed the number of younger persons to reach approximately 22% of the world's population (Abdullah and Wolbring 2013; Nosowska, McKee, and Dahlberg 2014). Statistics Canada's most recent population report (2017) shows the largest change in Saskatchewan occurs in the 65 and over age

group with that group accounting for 16% of the population. In addition, the only age group in which women outnumber men is this older age group. Population trends, of this nature, have significant implications for older adults as a group, for older women as a distinct social group, and for society as a whole. Phelan (2011) points to improved health care and expanded social support to assist older adults in maintaining good physical, financial, and mental health for a longer period of time. This population expansion is often framed as an impending burden on working age people as providers of security to an aging population and an increasing strain on an over-taxed health care system (Fealy, Treacy, and Lyons 2012). It is in this capacity of framing of an entire group of people that the media have an important role to play.

Ageism is an ideology, a set of beliefs, which manifests as negative stereotypes about older adults. These stereotypes tend to legitimate the dehumanization of older adults and their loss of identity and ability to act of their own accord on the basis of perceptions of impaired physical health and cognitive ability, leading to marginalization and loss of power of this entire social group (Phelan 2011). Marginalization and loss of power allows for discrimination based on age that affects possibilities for employment and how older adults interact with, and are treated by, the health care system and social services (Marier and Revelli 2016). Rozanova, Northcott, and McDaniel (2006) recognize two distinct forms of ageism: inter-generational ageism and intra-generational ageism. The first form refers to how older adults are perceived as having less value than their younger counterparts, in terms of contributions to the economy, physical and cognitive abilities, and being unable to keep up with changing times. The second form highlights the division that exists between older adults who are aging well, coined third agers, and those who are not aging as well, fourth agers (see also "new ageism" in Marier and Revelli 2016). The way in which media defines what it means to age very much influences how both forms of ageism manifest and impact the lives of older adults.

Third agers, also known as the young-old, are those retired older adults who remain active, healthy, and vital members of their communities and fourth agers, the old-old, are individuals who closely linked with suffering the effects of declining physical and cognitive health leading to inevitable death (Higgs and Gilleard 2014; Rozanova, Miller, and Wetle 2016). Media has a role in this construction of a third and fourth age through its focus on individuals who illustrate the third age and in the news stories it deems newsworthy. To maintain status as a third ager, individuals must volunteer or maintain some sort of employment and other social relationships, be consumers of products to stem the tide of aging, and avoid the decline into fourth age that signals loss of independence and self-identity (Fealy et al. 2013; Phelan 2011; Rozanova et al. 2016). The assignment of individuals to the third or the fourth age group is framed as purely an individual's life choices leading to stigmatization of those in the fourth age. In addition, media's focus on third agers can be seen as a form of ageism, in that not

aging or defying the stereotypes, is the only acceptable way to age (Fraser, Kenyon, Lagacé, Wittich, and Southall 2016; Low and Dupuis-Blanchard 2013; Rozanova et al. 2006).

The media, in all its forms, have the capacity to spread large amounts of information and as such holds a great deal of power to shape people's thinking. The way in which media presents issues, events, and social groups influences the opinion of others through the use of images and language to create a particular representation of each. In terms of older adults as a social group, the media, more often than not, puts forth a negative message of what it means to age (Marier and Revelli 2016). As Bai (2014) states, the presence of positive representations can contribute to positive attitudes about aging among both older adults and the larger society, which leads to interest in looking at how media portrays older adults. Further, there is currently an active reconstruction of what it means to be an older adult, propelled by a changing economy, improvement of health, and changes within society, that has expanded the possibilities of aging leading to increased longevity, active lifestyles, and continued societal value and benefit throughout a life span (Fealy et al. 2013; Higgs and Gilleard 2014). Older adults, as a social group, are diverse and a one size fits all approach to reporting about this group is insufficient.

Media is an essential part of society in its role as a venue for social interaction and participation in society in general, through passing on information and also through distilling information into easily understood words, phrases, and images that come to define particular groups (Abdullah and Wolbring 2013). In this way, relationships between younger and older generations that may have little direct knowledge of each other are created, and either positive or negative associations form depending on how groups are constructed (Lepianka 2015). This, in turn, impacts the treatment of older adults in society; as positive portrayals replace negative ones, it can be expected that people will enjoy more respect and care as they age (Koskinen, Salminen, and Leino-Kilpi 2014). In addition, as Fealy et al. (2013) point out there is a dichotomous definition of aging in which older adults are presented as either enjoying life after work while leading active, healthy lives or as frail, cognitively impaired drains on the system.

This sets up an unequal power relationship between older adults and society at large, as well as between older adults as a social group. In terms of power differences between older adults, television, in particular, reflects a hierarchy that places representations of older men above older women, affluence above financial insecurity, and married adults above those who are widowed or have never married. That most of the world's political leaders are men, working in positions of power past the retirement age for other older adults, highlights the privileged place of wealthy, older men on a global scale, and the pressure placed on women to maintain their youthful appearance also signals an imbalance on how individuals are allowed to age (Rozanova et al. 2006). Fraser et al. (2016) assert that these power imbalances expose older adults to discrimination based on age and exclusion of their voices from public discussions regarding their needs as a group. The knowledge of older adults, formed by media portrayals, reflects and can reinforce existing unequal relationships of power that puts many older adults at a disadvantage in terms of meaningful participation in society, especially women who are much less visible in media (Bai 2014; Phelan 2011;

Nosowska et al. 2014). To accurately depict the day-to-day lives of all citizens, and as shapers of how the general public understands aging, the media has the responsibility to fully report the contributions and capabilities of older adults (Fealy et al. 2013).

Lepianka (2015) acknowledges that no social group is exempt from negative reporting in that most groups tend to have both negative and positive stereotypes attached to them. Concerning for older adults is the construction of warm, caring, and generous older adults juxtaposed with frail, dependent, and cognitively impaired older adults. In the case of the construction of frailty and dependency, older adults can be perceived as a social problem and a burden on their families and on society. This particular way of constructing aging can also place older adults in the role of “deserving” and “undeserving” when it comes to services available and provided to them (Marier and Revelli 2016: 3). As Higgs and Gilleard (2014) argue, successive groups of older adults are entering later life more financially secure than groups before them, allowing for more freedom to participate in social life and enjoy an active lifestyle, and as a result age, as a number, is less of a determinant of old age, but physical decline remains a significant indicator that signals a loss of self-identity and the freedom to make decisions.

Language used within media influences the language of the general public and how issues are discussed, which in turn, offers legitimacy to perceptions of what it means to age (Phelan 2011; Bai 2014). Often language used in media is steeped in subtle, and not-so-subtle, ageist stereotypes that create and reinforce stereotypical images of aging that impact how older adults see themselves and how society sees older adults as a group (Nosowska et al. 2014; Phelan 2011; Bai 2014). In response to Rosanova et al.'s (2006) observation that the construction of what it means to be an older adult has changed over time and will continue to change, changing the language used to portray the lives of older adults could assist in mitigating the effects of negative stereotypes of aging.

Further, language used by media tends to lump individuals together within their associated groups (i.e. pensioners, older folks, senior citizens, aging parents) thus erasing individual differences and the diversity that is inherent in any social group (Fealy et al. 2013; Lepianka 2015). This is especially troubling when it comes to the use of particular language to describe older adults, as is the general lack of representation of older adults, in policy decisions as language choices underline imbalances of power and have a significant impact on what supports are considered necessary and how they are delivered to older adults (Fealy et al. 2013; Nosowska et al. 2014). Koskinen et al. (2014) also highlight the tendency of the general public to adjust their perceptions to align with the way in which media portrays groups. In effect, the language used to construct older adults reflects a part of reality, but in such a way as to simplify and sort individuals into specific roles within the group and to separate groups from each within the larger society (Fealy et al. 2013). The term frail is one such pointed use of language that represents a specific aspect of aging, separating those who are aging well from those who are not and from those who are still chronologically young and productive within society, as well (Higgs and Gilleard 2014).

Reaction to terms, such as frail, affects behavior which in turn reinforces and cultivates the spread of ageist stereotypes and stigmatizes older adults (Fealy et al.

2013; Lepianka 2015; Low and Dupuis-Blanchard 2013). Ageist stereotypes, mirrored in language, assists in a process of othering that excludes older adults from full participation in society and implies that somehow the needs of older adults are drastically different from those of younger people (Higgs and Gilleard 2014; Phelan 2011; Lepianka 2015). Negative aspects of othering entail labeling older adults as feeble and dependent, leading to segregation and relinquishing of identity within the managed environment of care homes reinforcing the view that older adults are inherently different from society at large (Fealy et al. 2013). Inter-generational and intra-generational ageism is very much in play during the process of othering highlighting differences between young and old and third agers and fourth agers.

As media is a powerful disseminator of information to the general public, close scrutiny of the messages that it is conveying is of the utmost importance. Media can propagate stereotypical perceptions or can challenge them (Bai 2014; Fraser et al. 2016). The perpetuation of negative stereotypes can lead to serious consequences when these simplified definitions of what it means to age become internalized within the individual impacting mental and physical health and increasing social isolation (Abdullah and Wolbring 2013; Bai 2013; Phelan 2011). In contrast, positive messages surrounding aging can lead to better cardiovascular and mental health, physical fitness, and better intergenerational relationships (Bai 2013). In addition, discrimination based on age and abuse of older adults may be reduced by educating the public through partnerships between older adults and the media (Abdullah and Wolbring 2013). Lack of representation in media may be more of a concern as it may point to an attitude of dismissal of stories that involve or impact older adults and as a more troubling signal of the actual little exclusion of older adults from public life as they age (Nosowska et al. 2014; Rozanova et al. 2006; Rozanova 2016).

This paper outlines how this particular study of media and ageism in Saskatchewan was conducted, the methods used, and how our data was analyzed. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study are summarized with a discussion of how these findings can add to the existing literature on ageism in the media and lead to positive changes in local media representations of older adults. The goal of this study is to examine the attitudes and beliefs present within news reporting in Saskatchewan and to uncover how readers of current news stories interpret them when using an age-sensitive lens. Engagement with volunteer monitors in the community offers an important glimpse into community reporting and into how readers perceive the stories and their subjects as presented by journalists.

Research Design

Data Collection and Sampling

For the purposes of this project, volunteer monitors were recruited by SSM to conduct local media monitoring studies within their communities for the month of February, focusing on Feb 6th to 18th. Daily news media, including daily papers, television and radio, were monitored on the 9th, 11th, 16th, and 18th of February, while communities with weekly papers were given more leeway. Media monitoring was further limited to Saskatchewan sources, and therefore excluded national papers, such as *The*

Globe and Mail and *National Post*. This exclusion criterion included reprinted sections of those papers within the local *Regina Leader Post* and *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*.

Monitoring criteria also excluded letters to the editor, cartoons, weather reports, and advertisements from coding.

Monitors were given in-person instruction by members of the SSM research team and coding sheets and guidelines for how to conduct the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. News stories could be about older adults, about events or reports that directly impact older adults, or about issues that may affect older adults in some way, even though not directly acknowledged within the story. Older adults were defined as persons who are stated, or estimated by monitors, to be 50 years of age or older. The number of stories coded varied by monitor's location, availability of media sources, and interpretation of what news stories applied to older adults. A total of twenty-nine monitors throughout Saskatchewan quantitatively coded 354 news stories (305 newspaper, forty-two television, and seven radio) and qualitatively analyzed eighteen news stories. According to three of our monitors, no news items during the monitoring time period related to older adults, and as a result, they did not complete any coding forms; however, they did provide brief feedback on the project.

Methodology

Mass media are powerful disseminators of knowledge about people, places, and events. The way in which media portrays these subjects influences the formation of beliefs and perceptions by the general public (Lepianka 2015). News media, especially newspapers, reflect public opinion, the political climate, and community life of an area and sets the tone for how topics are discussed and shapes attitudes about these topics (Fealy et al. 2012). As Koskinen et al. (2014) state, media both shapes and reflects the public's beliefs and attitudes about older adults, and as often the only exposure some people receive of older adults is through media, it is imperative to analyze the messages it is sending into the world.

To analyze these messages, two distinct research questions informed this project. Firstly, "Are older adults represented in news stories on radio, television, and newspapers in Saskatchewan? How are they represented?" and following that question, "How do people, especially older adults, interpret news stories as presented by all media?" These types of research questions required different methods to collect relevant data. For the first question, it was appropriate to use a quantitative survey method. To collect deeper information of both the news stories and monitors' particular interpretations, a semi-structured voluntary questionnaire allowed space to provide further insights on particular stories and on the project as a whole. The quantitative surveys (with additional 276 comments), eighteen qualitative analysis questionnaires filled out by monitors, and twenty-two personal communications between monitors and researchers were used in the analysis portion of this project. Further, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected within the same time period and were used in a complementary manner in the final analysis (see convergent designs in Creswell 2014; Guetterman, Fetters, and Creswell 2015; Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie 2013; Pluye and Hong 2014).

Similar to the work of Rozanova et al. (2006: 377), our monitors were given the task of ascertaining, as much as possible, the age of individuals within news stories, providing information about the context of the story, specific issues covered, and what underlying themes might be present in each analyzed story. As age is only one social characteristic, monitors often voluntarily added additional information including the gender, marital status, health, and ethnicity of the older adults present in stories. While socio-economic status (SES) was rarely indicated, there were a few instances where this information became apparent in relation to qualitative observations made by monitors. The context of, and issues raised by, stories was sometimes difficult to accurately determine by monitors, and themes were more readily apparent within the qualitative analysis portion of the study.

The use of more than one data collection method has a number of benefits including increased validity of results through triangulation of methods, the input of different perspectives to deepen analysis, a larger in scope examination of older adults and the media, and the ability to combine the strengths of each method to minimize any inherent weaknesses (Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie 2013; Pluye and Hong 2014). This project recognizes that the best way to understand the experience of another person is to ask the person, and through better understanding that person's experience, a more complete picture of a particular phenomenon, media and ageism, can emerge from analysis (Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie 2013). The final analysis is informed by the interpretations of the monitors and the researchers in a jointly-constructed understanding of how media portrays older adults, how older adults interpret media stories, and as an integration of both the quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell 2014; Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie 2013).

Media Monitoring Process

Monitors were given coding sheets that outlined how each variable was defined for the purposes of quantitative measurement. Page number or place in newscast was given a numerical or alphabetic assignment, and as such, is treated as a nominal measurement that describes the location of the story, no matter media type. Variables for topic, scope, space, and information about journalists and the individuals in the story were also nominal, as codes were used to assign categories. The exception was stated and estimated ages, which were ordinal level of measurement with ages organized into groups. The level of measurement for the analysis section of the coding sheet was also ordinal using a three- or four-point Likert scale to assign value to the statements. If a story was recommended for further qualitative analysis, monitors used an analysis sheet with accompanying guiding questions to assist in their analyses.

For qualitative analysis, our monitors were asked to pay special attention to headlines, sources, language usage, visual images, story angle and perspective, and the placement or positioning of the story in the newscast or paper. There was further opportunity to comment on the journalist's specific skills in presenting the story. Relevant skills included accuracy, fairness, use of data and other characteristics. Most monitors closely followed the provided framework of questions for their analyses, but some went beyond those questions to provide a more complete explanation of their thought processes. In addition, the depth of analysis varied between monitors from a few sentences to full-page analyses of impressions and commentary. As noted above,

any comments or explanations present on quantitative coding sheets included with personal communications between monitors and our research team for analysis.

Analysis

Quantitative coding data was entered into Excel spreadsheets for ease of sharing among our research team members and for its capability of performing simple statistical tasks, such as determining average number of stories, most frequent page in which stories were found, the mode of topics covered, and summative counts of other variables. Pie charts and graphs, created within Excel, were used for ease of conveying findings to a variety of stakeholders. All codes provided by monitors were added to the spreadsheets even when guidelines for filling out the surveys were not followed. For example, if the story analyzed was based on a report, monitors were asked to skip questions about age, role of subject, and so on because the subject was a report. In some cases, monitors did not assign codes or inferred information about age and other variables from the content of the news story. This last tendency became an important part of the analysis as it showed the tendency of our monitors to read more into the story than what was apparent in the text.

Analysis of qualitative data was facilitated through the use of NVivo for coding of questionnaires, survey comments, and personal communications. Coding began inductively by using words and themes that arose from our data followed by the inclusion of themes present within existing literature to capture more general themes (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; Hennick, Hutter, and Bailey 2013; Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This hybrid approach to coding uses existing literature to support findings of current research while allowing for the possible emergence of new themes. The first codes to emerge related to aging well versus the vulnerabilities of aging, lack of representation, health and healthcare, and language. Informed by current research, other themes became apparent in our data, including the dichotomy of third and fourth agers, the exclusion of older adult voices, and the gendered aspects of ageism, to name just a few, as described in Table 1.

Theme	Definition	Examples
Aging Well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seen as maintaining physical and cognitive health and contributing to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Older adults are active and contributing members of society”
Vulnerabilities of Aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seen as declining health, injuries and hospitalizations, and loss of independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “the hardships of aging (...), surgeries, and hospital stays,”
Health and Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes concerns such as: Quality of care, clinics and programs, and funding for healthcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Recipients depend on an expansion of services, not diminishment”
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impressions created through words chosen: Age positive, age neutral, or ageist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Royal Doulton hip bones” “Geezers”
Third and Fourth Agers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seen as a separation between the groups in terms of being vital members of the community and active and fit or frail and elderly nursing home residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “There is a stigma against being labeled a senior, and most younger folk, 60-70, stay as far away as possible”
Exclusion of Older Adult Voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manifests as lack of representation or as lack of input into stories related to older adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Older adults were left out of consideration”
Gendered Aspects of Ageism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manifests in lack of representation and in differing portrayals for each gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Quilting (as an) activity for older women” “Women serving cake at a church”

Table 1: Table of selected codes from initial analysis

Findings

Quantitative Findings

As shown in figure 1, the majority of the stories coded by monitors were found in newspapers (86%). This underlines the lack of representation of older adults that exists in television (12%) and radio (2%) news when compared to newspapers. Taking into

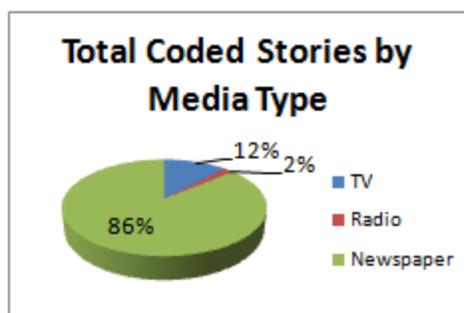


Figure 1: Number of news items coded by media type

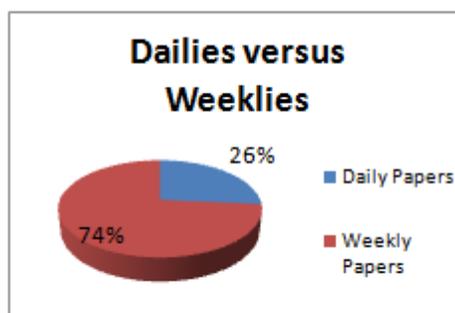


Figure 2: Number of newspapers published daily versus weekly present in this project

account that the bulk of papers analysed were printed weekly may reveal something about urban versus rural reporting tendencies. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of stories coded based on whether the paper was printed daily or weekly. Weekly papers (74%) represented smaller rural communities while dailies (26%) represented the larger Saskatchewan urban centres of Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw.

Scope and Topic by Media Type

Shown in figure 3, the most frequent scope of news stories was local news. This was mostly due to the abundance of news related to local older adults found in small

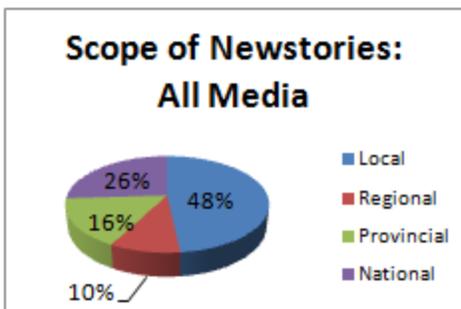


Figure 3: Scope of news items for all media types

community papers. Television most often represented provincial news, while radio reported at the national level almost exclusively. This result can be attributed to the target audience of each media type. The most common topic, shown in Table 2, assigned to coded news stories for television was violent crime and accident or disaster; for newspapers, community life; and for radio, national or international news as part of local news.

Community papers represented their affiliated communities, while television and radio, with broader reach, needed to appeal to a much broader population with varying interests and needs. Overall, community life accounted for 30% of all stories related to older adults across all media types.

Media Type	Most Repeated Topic	Number of References	Total Coded (Empty Cells)	Percentage of All Coded Items (%)
Television	Violent Crime/ Accident	11	42(4)	26
Newspapers	Community Life	98	305(90)	32
Radio	National/International as part of Local	6	7(1)	86

Table 2: Most repeated topic for each media type

Data about a Person in the Story for All Media

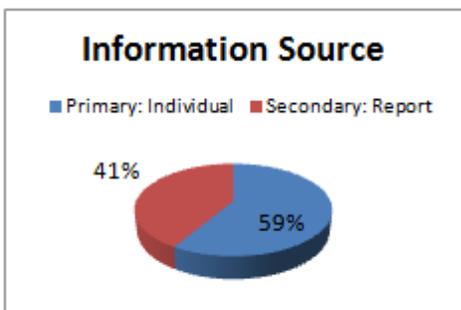


Figure 4: Primary source of information for news item

In terms of content of stories for all media types, whether the story was based on a report or based on an individual or group as a primary source of information, tended towards the use of primary sources (59%) as shown in figure 4. Of those that used individuals as primary sources of information, the stated age (figure 5) was not applicable (N/A) or difficult to determine for the majority (75%) of stories coded. At times, this difficulty may have arisen from the tendency of journalists relying on the input of individuals who

were younger than the analysis target age of 50, even though stories applied to the

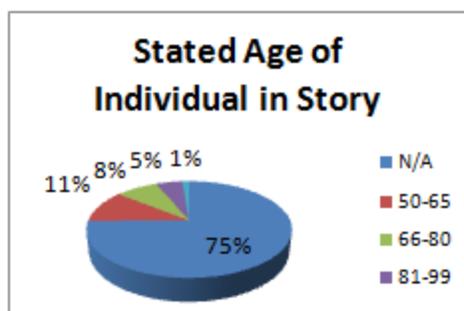


Figure 5: Age of individual as stated in news item

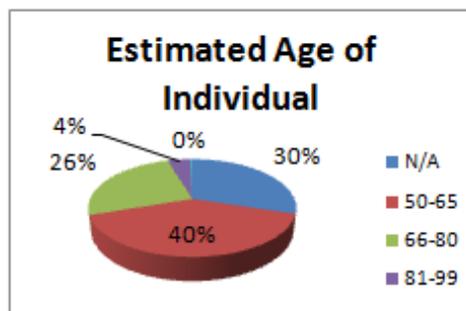


Figure 6: Age of individual as estimated by monitors

interests of older adults. The categories of N/A and 50 to 65 years of age (11%) were most chosen for a total of 86% of the stories over all media types. As shown in figure 6, monitors used their discretion when estimating the ages of sources, and again, for the majority (70%) of cases, age fell within the 50 to 65 (40%) age range or were N/A (30%). The percentage of zero assigned to the 81 to 99 age range represents one individual who was estimated to fall within this range.

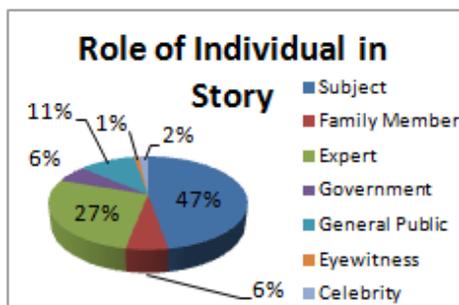


Figure 7: Role assigned to individual in news story

The role of each individual involved in the news story was interpreted by monitors using the general categories shown in the legend of figure 7. The most frequent role assigned to individuals was that of subject (47%), followed by the use of experts in telling the story (27%). The content of many news stories coded involved telling of life stories to celebrate birthdays or the life work of an individual, and the focus on the individual as a subject or as an expert in their field makes journalistic sense.

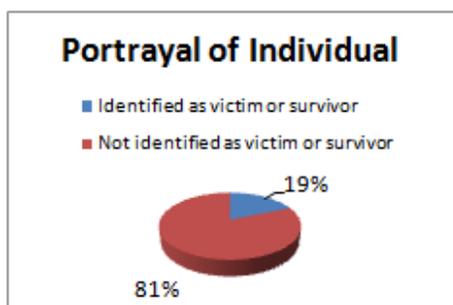


Figure 8: Individual portrayed as victim or survivor

Of all news stories coded, figure 8 shows that only 19% of individuals depicted within news stories were labeled as victims or survivors. Of those, 27% of individuals were victims or survivors of illness and 24% were victims of accidents as illustrated in figure 9. This lends support to existing literature that suggests older adults are constructed as coping with declining physical health as they age and thus more susceptible to illnesses and accidents.

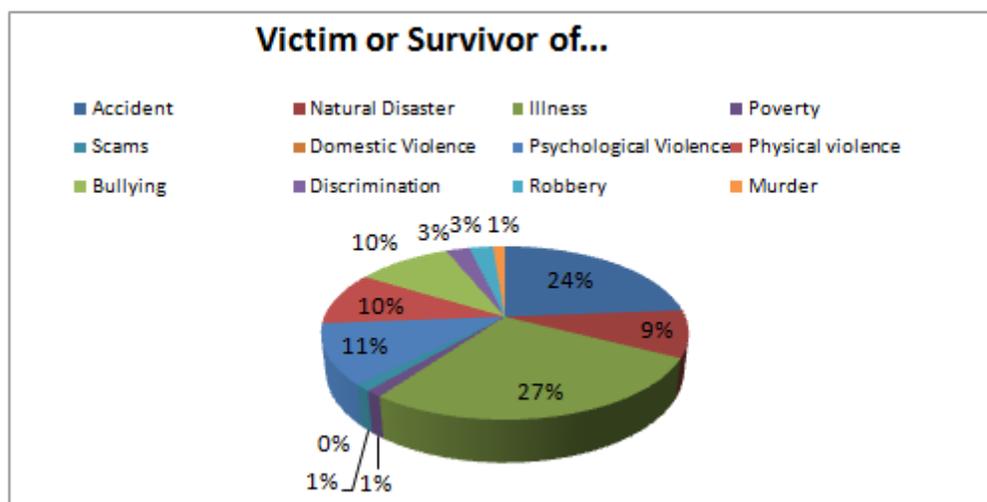


Figure 9: Individual described a victim or survivor of particular event

The majority of news stories of all media types that used an individual as a primary source of information directly quoted (66%: see figure 10) and showed the individual on camera or in a printed photograph (55%: see figure 11). As illustrated by figure 12, most of these images were categorized as positively representing older adults

(59%) with only 7% interpreted as images that emphasized the challenges of aging or disability.



Figure 10: Was the individual directly quoted?

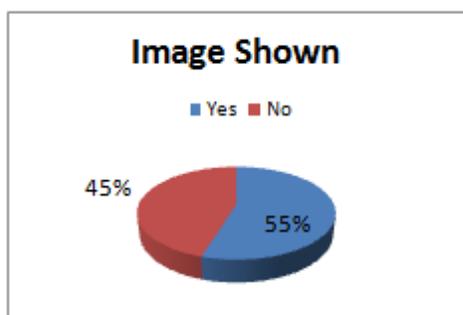


Figure 11: Was an image of the older adult shown?

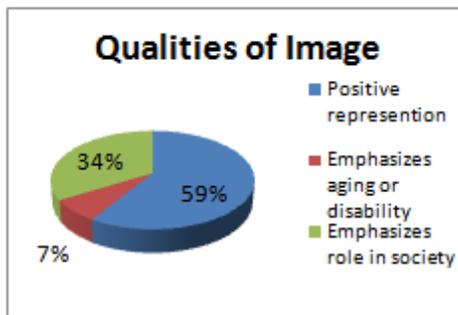


Figure 12: What was the general representation of the older adult?

Analysis of Story for All Media

The analysis section of the coding sheet required monitors to think more critically about the content and message of the news item. They were asked to determine the subject of the story and whether it highlighted the challenges of aging or challenged ageist stereotypes. Figures 13 through 15 illustrate the results. For all media, the focus of news stories was most often a particular older adult (42%).

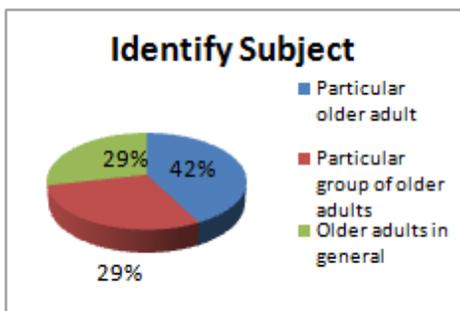


Figure 13: Who was the news item referring to?

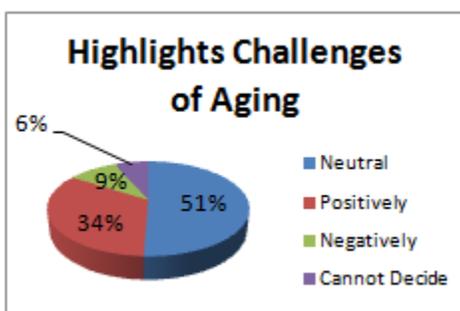


Figure 14: How did the news item represent the challenges of aging?

The reports were generally neutral (51%) or positive (34%); although, our monitors found that 9% of the stories they read, listened to, or watched negatively portrayed the challenges of aging. In terms of challenging ageist stereotypes, 52% of the news stories were perceived as challenging with 33% being assigned the code of "Cannot decide." If the neutral and positive results from figure 14 (51%, 34%) are totaled and compared to the challenging and cannot decide categories of figure 15 (52%, 33%), the two results equal each other (85%) showing that monitors saw the stories as either being neutral or positive about aging while also challenging ageist stereotypes, or at least not propagating them.

In general, monitors found stories to be positive towards older adults and aging. However,

stories interpreted to be negative (9%) towards the challenges of aging remained consistently associated with stories that did not challenge (15%) ageist stereotypes. The increase in responses (Figure 15) of “Cannot decide” could have be attributed to the amount of responses that labeled stories as neutral, in that stories neither reinforced nor challenged ageist stereotypes.

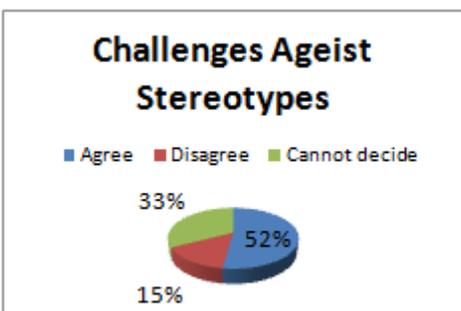
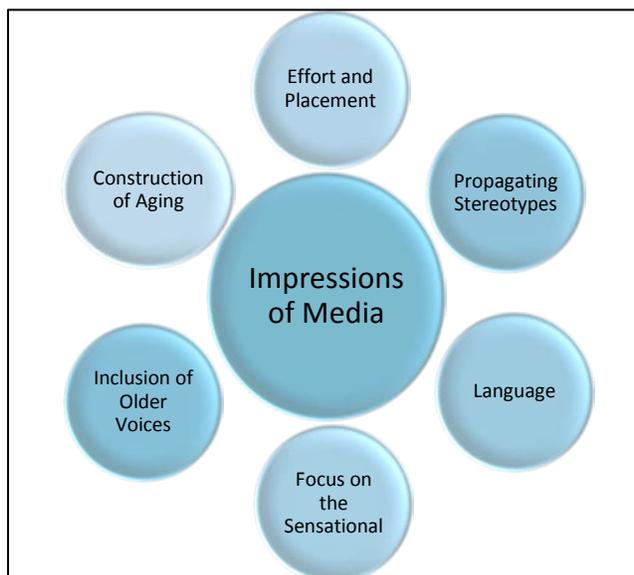


Figure 15: Did this news item challenged ageist stereotypes?

Some of our monitors analyzed the same news items (seven instances). In each case, monitors displayed different opinions on some variables, especially topic of stories, but were consistent in their analysis of the news stories and in the types of sources used. For example, in the analysis section, ‘Identify Subject’, monitors agreed on whether the story related to a particular older adult and so on. Further, monitors most often agreed on positive representations of the challenges of aging and agreed that items challenged ageist stereotypes. In cases of disagreement, monitors assigned ‘Neutral’ or ‘Cannot decide’ to stories as opposed to agreeing those stories were positive and challenging stereotypes.



news media. Our monitors revealed their understanding of how media portrays older adults, and what is ageist in media within this portion of the study, by reflecting on construction of aging, inclusion and

Figure 16: Media representation of older adults

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative analysis of the data from our coding sheets, deeper analysis of stories, and personal communications entailed looking for recurring themes in word usage or in general meaning of analyses. After further analysis and inclusion of additional themes, recurring themes were sorted into general categories to reveal connection to larger categories: ‘Impressions of Media’ and ‘Media Defined Roles of Older Adults’. Figure 16 illustrates themes that emerged in terms of the first research question related to representation of older adults in

exclusion of older adults' voices in stories, and from the news in general, language used, and other ways that media propagates stereotypes, including effort and placement of the story. Corresponding with quantitative findings, monitors felt that Saskatchewan media, in news items related to older adults, did provide positive depictions of older adults and aging.

Construction of Aging

Saskatchewan media, during the monitoring period, tended to construct a very definite image of older adults and depiction of the aging process, in that media was seen as "showcasing that older adults are active and contributing members of society." Another monitor concluded that stories gave "the overall impression (...) that older adults like to get involved and encourage others to do the same." Some news stories did acknowledge the challenges of aging, such as "the story was introduced in an age friendly manner, acknowledging the capabilities of an old lady, age 103". This item concluded that older adult "is not ready to live in a care home because she is very useful, depicting a sense of independence (...) at her age," which reflects the generally positive message promoted by the majority of news stories surrounding aging. In fact, one headline explicitly highlighted the ideal of aging well, "A guide to active aging in our city," and outlined the numerous opportunities available to older adults for physical activity. Physical activity was a central focus of many news items, and swimming, pickle ball, and curling were presented as good choices "especially for adults who may have mobility issues" and want an activity that is "easy to learn and safe, with low risk of injury."

This message was starkly contrasted with media focus on death and illness of all age groups. This emphasis on death can be attributed to the appeal of sensational stories, but in the case of construction of aging, does leave the impression of inevitable decline of older adults, followed by their impending death. If articles were not specifically about hearing clinics, breast cancer screening, or the potential causes of Alzheimer's disease, sections of papers were dedicated to obituaries and in memoriam items. During the monitoring period, a Canadian celebrity died, and one monitor remarked, "I watched 4 hours [and the] only relevant subject was the death of Stuart McLean, aged 68." An article that appeared in many of the papers outlined how bungalows were "the best choice for accessible living," and another announced the arrival of a water bicycle at the local pool that can help people recovering from knee and hip surgery. In both cases, target age was not explicitly stated, but monitors inferred that these articles were of interest to older adults who may have mobility issues.

One monitor humorously remarked, "the only thing about older adults (...) universally celebrated was birthdays. It was almost as if they were surprised you made it that far!" Recognizing birthdays seemed to be an important part of community life, in that, a number of articles focused on the life story of individuals celebrating milestone birthdays, including people turning 102 and 103 years old. In one community, a monitor mentioned that birthdays are "celebrated monthly at the local seniors' centre." Even though birthdays were publicly recognized, negative associations with aging were still apparent and often reflected in placement of birthday announcements alongside obituaries. In addition, commentaries in some papers, written by local journalists, often involved sharing "aches and pains and difficulty with life" and "the hardships of aging,

needing to move, depending on younger people for visits and general assistance, surgeries, and hospital stays,” which somewhat dampens the celebratory aspects of birthdays.

There were many stories that dealt with stereotypical issues of aging, including fraud directed at “seniors”, commentaries about “having trouble getting around as she (the reporter) is just recently out of the hospital,” and other articles that “single out seniors as a specific group that will be affected...writing them off as incompetent and unable to navigate modern technology.” In the last case, the monitor wondered “what this journalist’s interaction with older adults has been.” One monitor explained a commentary that, on the one hand, discussed the benefits “of learning new things as a way to grow and learn, and that change needs to be embraced,” and on the other, reinforced stereotypes by stating that “older adults can’t compete with younger adults” when it comes to new technology. Another monitor summed up her impression of an article that seemed to challenge ageist stereotypes, while subtly reinforcing them: “I think that it is the inconsistency of language and the accompanying impression of old equals frail that is the downfall of an article that wants to discourage ageism in healthcare.” From the analyses of all monitors, Saskatchewan media’s depiction of what it means to age was split between those who are active and aging well and those who are living with health issues, and monitors’ positive reactions to stories that focus on third agers who “break the stereotypes” does support the idea that how media portrays social groups influences how the rest of society views them.

Language

Language used by journalists, columnists, and reporters was another theme on which monitors provided commentary. Terms, including “frail”, “frail residents,” or “the frail and the elderly,” were used often in news items analyzed, and at times, by our monitors in their comments. One monitor, in particular, commented on her reaction to the term “veteran” as “an off-hand comment for a person assumed to be between 60 and 65 years old. I took it to be derogatory and offensive.” In other cases, the language used, by journalists, portrayed older adults in a positive light “...as a vibrant and knowledgeable source.” One article, discussing an 80 year old goalie, described an older adult as “forever young.” Members of a local Lions Club were described as being “visible and active.”

In some cases, language used was more subtly ageist — “even though he turned 80 on November 2” — revealing an underlying belief that older adults who are still capable are an exception to the rule. Some of the more colourful language used to describe older adults, include: “geezers,” “dinosaurs,” crusty old guy,” and “change freaks us out.” To be fair, those descriptors were used in a light-hearted way, but do reinforce ageist stereotypes. The most creative use of language was: “If I were a senior with Royal Doulton hip bones, I wouldn’t venture past my mailbox.” These words painted a very vivid picture of the frailty of older adults and further underlined the distinction between those older adults who remained active and healthy and those who were experiencing physical limitations.

Inclusion and Exclusion of Older Voices

Another theme present in the data was that older adults were often not given the opportunity to tell their own stories. A sampling of comments from our monitors regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the voices of older adults, include:

- “I feel that older adults were left out of consideration of the need for guaranteed basic income;”
- “Focus of the article was on ER security rather than the impact on the older adult;”
- “None of the donors [older adults] were interviewed just the principal of the school who received the funds;” and
- “(...) might have been interesting to hear from some of the older adults (...) to hear what their thoughts were (...)”

One article in particular, about a blanket activity led by a local elder, missed out on the opportunity to include the perspective of the elder and instead focused on the importance of this activity for the “leaders of tomorrow.” In another story, “older adults are not interviewed, even though the new technology is designed with them in mind” and no one for whom accessibility is an issue was interviewed or quoted (...) lacked any first-hand experience of the issue.” When older adults’ “voice[s] and opinions are given prominence in the story,” the story resonated more strongly with monitors, especially when those voices were used “to sum up the story.” One monitor came to the conclusion that increasing inclusion of older adults as active parts of news items “allows for a fair and accurate presentation without the journalist placing his own interpretation in the forefront.”

The absence of older adults in news media dismayed many monitors and led one to conclude that this signified “institutionalized discrimination by the media, regardless of topic.” Related to newspapers, a common thread among our monitors was summed up by this sentiment used by more than one monitor: “This paper had no articles that referred even remotely to older adults, except obituaries (...) there was more ignoring of seniors (...) than there was evidence of them.” One monitor came to the realization that “seniors’ contributions are largely unrecognized and their potential to contribute to communities under demanded.” Another was extremely critical of the lack of reporting about older adults in the community on local radio stations and described this type of reporting as an “el cheapo show” as journalists “clearly made no effort to discover local news or events” and “the only thing (...) on local radio (...) was a 10% discount for 60 or older at the local grocery store.” This led one monitor to infer that radio “did not (...) even acknowledge that [older adults] even exist.” Regarding television, there was recognition of lack of reporting related to older adults, and for one monitor, he felt that “except for Peter Mansbridge (CBC National) and Jeff Rogstad (CTV Saskatoon), I had nothing in common age-wise with the other newscasters” as they did not represent his age group or its interests. Most monitors relayed their disappointment and surprise in the absence of stories for older adults — “even Farm Gate [on CTV] which sometimes interviews with older people let me down.” There is a bright side for one monitor who observed that “there was no incident of ageism” since no news items appeared at all related to older adults. The increased presence of older adults within news media could

assist in avoiding criticisms of exclusion of older adults' voices or of their complete absence from media.

Effort and Placement

For many monitors, journalistic effort and placement of the story in the newscast or within the paper gave clues to the particular way that older adults are viewed in society. A common place for stories targeted to older adults "was on the same page as the obituaries, and it was clearly aimed at an audience of older adults based on the headline ['60 and over Club Report']." Other stories were placed alongside stories about individuals living in LTCs, and monitors found that this created "a nice balance" between the two constructions of aging, third and fourth age. Other monitors observed a positioning of stories about older adults with stories about younger people. For example, a story about an older adult goalie was placed "at the bottom of a page about young hockey stars," explaining that this "placement was good." Images used contributed to an overall positive reaction to stories and their placement: "The writer had lots of information about the subject so he did his homework and the picture in the article was in colour and flattering (...) lending itself to increased readership." Lack of pictures tended to deliver a more negative message, in that "[the article] could easily have been missed" and "so seemed less important."

One monitor called on journalists to spend more time delivering a full story that could dispel stereotypes: "the missing voice for me was the younger adult who will also be affected (...) I think the 'pensioner' is right in saying, 'It can happen to anybody,' but the journalist makes no effort to show that is the case." Some monitors were tough on journalists suggesting that "the placement of the story [on the last page] and the way it was written suggest that the journalist also didn't spend much time on the story (...) it felt like a 'fill-in' in many ways." Others implied that journalists write about the easy topics that catch the interest of the majority of readers: "My observation of the newspapers (...) is that they are filled with articles about crime, policing, and community sports." There was general feeling that "based on placement, size and lack of in-depth journalism/research done (...) that this issue is not of much importance (...) to our society in general." Another monitor came to the scathing conclusion that it seemed "journalists are paid by the word rather than quality of reporting."

Many of the stories analyzed dealt with either exceptional older adults who had "broken the stereotypes of aging," but others focused on the experience of extraordinary individuals, no matter their age. Two monitors drew attention to the reporting of the "air traffic investigation into Harrison Ford (age 74) who made a serious mistake piloting his personal plane." This reporting might have been related to interest in celebrities, but also showed a subtle reinforcement of the notion that older adults should not be driving any sort of vehicle. Another monitor noted the vast amount of reporting "well over 95% of the 'over 50s article' (...) focused on Trump, O'Leary, Harrison Ford, Bill Gates, Douglas Garland, and Stuart McLean." In each of these cases, the older adults in question were either famous, or infamous in the case of Garland, and as such their age did not take the forefront of these reports.

Propagating of Stereotypes: Forms of Ageism

Similar to Rozanova et al.'s (2006) inter-generational and intra-generational ageism, Marier and Revelli (2016: 5) outline three types of ageism: compassionate ageism, intergenerational ageism, and new ageism. These types of ageism proved to be a useful framework on which to base analysis of how media in Saskatchewan construct stories about older adults. By tackling how media constructs aging from the basis of uncovering ageism, subtle trends in reporting were more easily recognized and specific characteristics, or roles, assigned to older adults as a group were more apparent.

Compassionate ageism refers to the belief that older adults need to be taken care of by society, and more specifically, by the government. This care takes the form of government policies that regulate retirement age and other policies that limit full participation of older adults in social life, based on the notion that older adults are frail, dependent, and unable to act on their own behalf. For example, one news item about a retiring firefighter drew the attention of a monitor: "This article negatively portrayed aging and did not challenge stereotypes because the man did not choose to retire; reaching the mandatory age forced him to retire." The individual is directly quoted as feeling like he was capable of performing his duties and being upset with the mandatory retirement age. Other monitors called attention to the need for better care for adults as they age: "a lot of families need places for their family members who require more care than can be provided at home." In response to this need for improved care promoted by media reports, one monitor remarked, "There is, if anything, a reinforcing of the stereotype of old age and poor health going hand in hand."

In contrast, the second form of ageism, intergenerational ageism, raises questions about how deserving older adults are of societal supports from the government. This type of ageism points toward a broader conservative political ideology that shifts the onus of physical, mental, and financial well-being onto the individual alone and argues for the dismantling of social supports like Old Age Security and universal healthcare. From this study, there were a number of reports and articles that implied older adults, as a growing population, may represent a threat to the healthcare system, and funding for healthcare services, such as hearing aid programs and long-term care. LTCs were mentioned by more than one monitor as not adequate to meet the needs of older adults: "recipients depend an expansion of services, not diminishment. They are currently inadequate!!!" Another monitor suggested that "this is a high priority need [which requires] further analysis and action," while another noted a need to "ease [the strain on the healthcare system because of] the 'wave of seniors' needing professional care in the future." One monitor astutely found that "there is an underlying assumption or starting point (...) that (...) older adults will become a burden on the health care system in the future." This perceived emerging strain on the system ties to the selective construction of older adults deteriorating physical and mental health.

The third form, new ageism, refers to the focus on successful, healthy aging, or third agers, as a concept that is an achievable goal for all that may not be achievable by all older adults, in reality. Like intergenerational ageism, the onus of continued well-being falls to the individual and failure to age well represents a failure of the individual, not a failure of society to adequately provide supports. One of our monitors commented:

“There is a stigma against being labeled a senior, and most younger folk, 60-70, stay as far away as possible (...) rather than welcome it as a badge of honour.” Monitors highlighted news items promoting the message of “a long life can be fulfilling and good health is achievable” and that challenged “seniors to be physically active for good health.” One monitor noted that stories focusing on the longevity and vitality of some older adults sent the message that “age does not put a barrier on what one can and cannot do.” This idea of active participation throughout the life span does not seem to extend to those individuals who have not aged ‘successfully.’ Many monitors commented on articles that discussed long-term care (LTC) facilities. One comment in particular points to the lack of voice of older adults in care facilities: “The story did not go into analysis, but just stated what they did [for activities during the week] such as Bible study, bingo, coffee, music, etc [sic].” This lack of input from individuals living in LTCs was repeated as only one story analyzed offered any quotes or interviews at all. Images attached to reports about LTCs were somewhat unflattering and negatively highlighted the challenges of aging. Another troubling aspect of reporting of older adults was the tendency to neglect “the distinction between older adults who are physically healthy and those who are not”, and conversely, even in apparent positive portrayals of older adults, stories tended to gloss over the reality that aging well “is true for some adults, but not all.” In the statement, “health issues can influence choices, but not take over,” one monitor demonstrated the recognition of different aging processes beyond individual choice.

Additional Themes Present

Intergenerational Trends: Young and Old

While not a dominant theme, intergenerational trends were apparent to a number of monitors. One such trend was the idea of older adults postponing retirement barring the entry of younger adults into the work force. In the opinion of one journalist, in relation to increasing life expectancy, “baby boomers will want to hold onto their jobs for longer, while millennials want jobs (and may not have the same work ethic).” In this quote, there was another stereotypically ageist assumption present, specifically, that younger adults possess a weaker work ethic than their older counterparts. Other news items discussed the plight of various organizations in their struggle to maintain memberships because “fewer young people are involved” leading to the reality of having to “disband (...) due to lack of members.” The desire to include younger adults was apparent from this quote: “Young people and their ideas are always welcome.” For these organizations, there was recognition of the importance of recruiting new and younger members. These news items highlighted how older adults are juxtaposed against younger adults. On the one hand, older adults were portrayed as having a strong work ethic, but on the other, needing younger people to keep organizations going and inject new ideas.

In other cases, older adults were shown interacting with younger people, such as a “picture of an older adult with a kindergartener.” This was in relation to a donation given by a local group to the school. Curling bonspiels were another example of different generations participating in social life together. One monitor pointed out a

“[small] article [about an older adult as newspaper carrier of the month] was situated on a page with photos of young families in the community.” This placement suggested an awareness of age diversity within the community and a desire to present a balanced report of community life. Another interpretation of the placement of articles about older adults alongside articles about younger adults or children was to subtly highlight the differences between these groups of people.

Roles of Older Adults

A number of distinct categories, of older adults as a group, emerged within the analysis of different stories of interest to monitors. Some have already been discussed in the preceding findings including stereotype shatterers, crises in waiting, and residents. Earlier in the qualitative section, the identity of ‘Stereotype Shatterers’ was illustrated in the reliance on sensational stories of older adults, such as Harrison Ford or Bill Gates. The identity of stereotype shatterer was also present in stories about older adults like the goalie who was 80 years old and in biographical news items celebrating birthdays and in memoriam. In particular, one article announced the upcoming 103rd birthday of a woman who “retired from curling at 80, remarried at 85, [and] was dancing on her 100th.” Stories like these tended to focus on how well the individual had aged and on how they retained their physical and cognitive abilities and their independence. The identity of ‘Crisis in Waiting’ was closely related to the identity of ‘Resident’ in news media through focus on the need for improvements in the healthcare system and in LTCs to cope with the increasing number of older adults in declining health and requiring care. Both these identities were also related to intergenerational ageism and new ageism.

Figure 17: Identify roles ascribed to older adults by media depiction



Consumers

This identity was surprising for some monitors, and one monitor summed up his impressions, while remarking on the absence of older adults from news reports, by stating that “it seemed to me that a large percentage of the advertising was aimed at older people.” One monitor noticed that some housing developments in their communities were “marketed to (sic) mature buyers in mind” and that “the emphasis was on the fact that the residents (...) were 55 and up.” Finally, another monitor, also dismayed at the lack of content related to older adults found one news item: “Best ‘report’ positively for aging—good image—was

the Tim Horton’s advert.” While advertisements were excluded from quantitative and qualitative coding, allowances were made to include these in the final analysis to shed light on how identity was constructed in more subtle ways in the absence of actual content related to older adults.

Wise Resources

A number of monitors commented on age positive stories that emphasized the value placed on older adults. These articles “emphasize[d] his resilience and wealth of life experience” and gave older adults the opportunity for “positive advice giving (...) about marriage and relationships (...) and what can be gained from their life experience and wisdom on the matter.” One article told the story of a young man who relied on “elders’ stories [to give] him something to make him feel like he belonged somewhere” and described how he, now an elder himself, continues to carry that legacy of passing down of wisdom. Other monitors drew attention to older adults’ ability to “contribute to the community by writing articles that highlight concerns for seniors or [to] simply contribute to community dialogues.” One monitor described this as: “It is one way where expertise of seniors is still sought out [as well as] contributions made by professionals in community, whether seniors or not.” Monitors described older adults in news stories as having “professional credibility as a retired, well-informed citizen (...)” and as “expert professional[s]” who “share the wisdom they have gathered over the years (...)”.

Volunteers

This final identity found in the project was complex for monitors as volunteering can be viewed as a benefit to communities and to individuals. One monitor wondered if this depiction “may implicitly perpetuate subtle ageist stereotypes with [the subject’s] heavy involvement in the community as an older adult” as volunteers were usually older adults in the news items analyzed by monitors. Another monitor concluded, when the articles failed to implicitly state actual age, that “volunteers (...) undoubtedly include older adults”, but the “ongoing contribution of seniors’ provid[e] useful (...) contributions for the community [and] to society” leading to confusion about whether being labeled a ‘volunteer’ was positive or negative.

Older adults were depicted as serving several important functions within their communities including “provid[ing] a variety of services at LTCs including visiting, spiritual care, (...) and assisting in staff shortages” and “making baby blankets for crisis centres in the province.” One monitor recognized “volunteerism [as a] positive aspect of retirement,” while others drew conclusions that “as (...) retired [women]” more time should be devoted to community service because “[we] seem to have lots of free time to volunteer (...)” Many other references were made to community involvement of older adults, including fundraising efforts and donations to local organizations provided by older adults, and public service awards given to older adults. So many that it could be concluded that only older adults donate their time and skills to the community, except that one volunteer awards banquet had “a separate category for older adults,” which indicated other age groups also volunteer.

Gendered Aspects of Aging

The contribution of older women seemed quite limited in this sampling of news items. After encountering a number of photos of older women donating quilts and blankets to local charities, one monitor observed that “quilting is stereotypically an activity for older women,” and in relation to another example, this same monitor “can’t decide if this is a stereotype and if it is, if it is positive or negative.” Another example of the portrayal of older women was a “photo of women serving cake at a church tea and

bake sale.” In contrast, a monitor drew attention to the positive portrayal of a male subject of one article who was “dressed in a suit [which] presents him in a professional light.” Portrayals of women as quilters and servers of tea analyzed by monitors might have been a reflection of traditional gender roles or might represent the invisibility of women in media except in those traditional gender roles as homemakers and caregivers. In contrast, one monitor pointed out the need to increase “understanding that older women gain wisdom as they age and that it is important to share that wisdom (...).”

Feedback from Monitors

Many monitors clearly stated that they needed to use their comprehension skills and read into stories presented to find the relation to older adults: “The stories we saw tended to be very limited in scope[,] and we had to dig deeper to get the message about seniors that they conveyed and in some cases implied.” In other instances, monitors thought beyond the scope of presented material to infer a connection to the interests or concerns of older adults, and in the case of this news item, “although older adults are not singled out, the results...could have a positive impact on the lives of older adults.” This ability of readers to move beyond the surface appearance of stories was apparent in a number of other monitors’ interpretations: “I think this article includes, by implication, older adults.” For topics of general interest, such as healthcare, one monitor found that “improving the healthcare system (...) would impact older adults as all age groups”, while another concluded that although a particular story “never mentioned older adults (...) they would likely be present.”

As illustrated by the meaning attributed to specific news items, monitors ascribed importance to news stories, whether or not older adults were specifically mentioned as subjects or interested parties, based on their inferences. One monitor showed understanding of the vulnerable position that older adults, as a group, can often be placed in, as she remarked, “the cuts will adversely affect ‘the poorest and most vulnerable’ [to use a phrase from the journalist] (...) albeit without specifically mentioning older adults (...) included the possible impact on older adults.” Lastly, one monitor complained, “I have found it difficult to assess a person’s age [because] Canadian newspapers and other media rarely state a person’s age, making it awkward to put an article’s topic into context.” This lack of context based on stated age complicated the coding process for monitors and the ability of monitors to understand what individual or social group was represented by news items.

Some monitors had emotional reactions to the types of reporting about older adults and the lack of representation of older adults: “I find it sad that the only mention of an older adult was when someone died as the result of a fatal collision,” and “I am a little disappointed (...) but (...) I knew that our news coverage, in general, is poor.” Other monitors noted that being a part of this project allowed them to “be more discerning and critical of what I am hearing, seeing, and reading in the news each day” and as a check on their own biases through “evaluating how not only the media portrays seniors, but any preconceived notions I may have.” Other monitors thought the monitoring exercise was unfair and “would have been more fair to journalists if they had

been informed [so they could] check their own work for overtly ageist language and stereotypes.”

One monitor showed understanding of the power of media to shape perceptions, in that “I can be easily ‘lulled’ by the news around me without giving it much critical thought and a thorough examination (...) it is easy to be caught up in the stereotypes and biases that it contains (because everyone has a bias and media people are no different),” or as another monitor phrased, readers can be “led down the ‘garden path’.” A common conclusion of monitors about remaining vigilant to stereotypes in media can be summed up in this quote: “It does take a lot of energy and intention to sustain this kind of critical viewpoint and analysis.” Most monitors found the training for, and instructions included with, the coding sheets allowed them to effectively analyze media reports and assisted them in observing portrayals of older adults, positive and negative, that they might have missed outside of this project.

Discussion

Ageism, as a process of othering and highlighting differences between young and older adults and between older adults as a group, is pervasive and surrounds all of us (Gendron, Welleford, Inker, and White 2016). To date, most media appear to be responsive of the need for increased presence of older adults in the news, and work done by advocacy groups, such as the SSM, is leading to changes at the systemic level that can mitigate negative perceptions of older adults leading to improved societal perceptions and self-perceptions for older adults (Goldberg 2009; Vickers 2007). As illustrated in the data collected during this project, work still needs to be done. Although what is visible tends to be positive, the overall lack of representation of older adults and the specific construction of aging present in Saskatchewan media highlights the need for collaboration. Meaningful dialogue between advocacy groups of older adults and the media can lessen the presence of ageism to avoid the negative consequences of perpetuating ageist stereotypes. Duncan (2008) states that to be truly fair and representative of older adults, changes to media reporting must begin with partnerships; thus avoiding the pitfalls of imposing changes without consultation and doing little to alleviate the situation. Older adults are a diverse group and to ignore this reality marginalizes significant segments of the older adult population. As demonstrated by the reliance on news items related to the third age, the needs, interests, and value of people within the fourth age is diminished to their detriment. Media can better serve the entire population of older adults by expanding what information is considered newsworthy and accurately portraying their distinctive needs.

As outlined by Dahmen and Cozma (2009), there are a number of ways that media and older adults can work together to produce news items that are responsive to the needs of all older adults. One of the first areas of consideration is the use of language. Avoiding language that promotes stereotypes or diminishes the value of older adults assists in challenging people’s understanding of aging. Media can also consider what older adults want to know and what is of interest to them. Decisions can be made through consultation, but as a focus on the third age of adulthood tends to overshadow the experience of those within the fourth age, generalizations about the interests of a diverse group of people should be avoided. By honestly examining personal biases, journalists can work to discover and correct any ageist tendencies in their reporting. In

addition, this self-reflexivity can assist in making reports that engage the interest of a wider segment of the population. Through communication with older adults, journalists gain a larger pool of resources to inform their reporting and open avenues for older adults to tell their stories, reflecting what is important to them.

Our data reflects much of the current literature on media and ageism. Lack of representation is one of the greatest indicators of ageism, which indicates a devaluing of older adults in society. When news items are related to older adults, the focus is most often on the active and healthy segment of the group with very little interest in the lives of older adults who represent the fourth age. While there is an overall neglect of the voices of older adults, the absence of the voice of people within the fourth age is a concern. The division of older adults, as a group, into third and fourth agers represents the 'new ageism' that sets up an uneven distribution of power. Another uneven distribution of power exists in the depiction of older adults along gender lines. In all cases, our data suggests that older adults are very narrowly defined as being either active or not, having value to the community or not, and more often male than female, when considered as being of value in the community. This is one area of research that could be more carefully analyzed in the future. Looking at the differing portrayals of older women and older men may uncover vulnerabilities that develop due to these portrayals and point ways toward bridging the gap between genders. It is also important to understand the ability of users of media to read into stories and draw their own conclusions from what they are presented. Our monitors exemplify this ability, and also, demonstrate understanding of the great influence has on the formation of our own biases.

In addition to a deeper analysis of the gendered aspects of ageism in the media, to truly understand the scale of the lack of representation of older adults in Saskatchewan media requires an accurate count of number of news items about older adults compared to an accurate count of all news items within a newscast or newspaper. A smaller team of trained researchers that have regular communication with each other and specific guidelines for inclusion and interpretation of news items could lead to more consistent results across all variables including placement and page count, type of source and number of sources, and so on. This more academic method of research can lead to results that are more consistent and reliable, and also a fairer and more accurate interpretation of media in Saskatchewan, but would lose the integral perspective of older adults. The use of older adults as monitors is a unique aspect of this project that allowed for analysis of older adults' attitudes and interpretations, which is a requisite for producing less biased and stereotypical content related to older adults.

Conclusions

As this project demonstrates, there is a need in Saskatchewan for more balanced reporting about and of interest to older adults. As often the only source for local news, television and newspapers represent a large population, one segment of which is often neglected. To remedy this situation, media needs to be aware of its biases to reflect a more accurate picture of aging and expand their portrayals of older adults beyond the dichotomy of active and vibrant volunteers versus frail and dependent residents. The interpretations of older adults of news items reveals a complex interplay of personal experience and bias combined with messages conveyed by the language and imagery

provided by media. There are many aspects of ageism that need to be addressed by media through consultation with advocacy groups and with older adults. Through consultation, media can become more responsive to the needs of all citizens including the growing population of older adults.

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