



Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

Aging is a clinical process, and older adults, or seniors, are usually defined by chronological age, usually 65 years or older. However, the process and those we consider “older adults” varies depending on genetics, lifestyle, and overall health, often influenced by social determinants of health (SDoH)*. Older adults represent an extremely diverse group across gender, ethnicity, race, religion, geography, orientation, ability, body size, and economic status. Everyone reading this will be an older adult at some point if lucky enough to live such a long life.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

Hollywood's representation of older adults is too often about experiences of loss of their capacities, self-esteem, and places in society. These depictions have severe repercussions on how older adults view themselves and how they're perceived, valued, and treated. They also cause young *and* old people to be repelled by aging, triggering misunderstandings and dismissals of older adults' needs and their experience, knowledge, and wisdom that come with age. This robs society of intergenerational connection and fuels ageist* policies that lead to lack of employment, social opportunities, and appropriate medical care. Authentic representation can improve and save lives, as well as enrich the lives of people of all ages.

OLDER ADULTS

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES & HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

- **Despondent:** Negative/sad lives due to isolation and poor physical and mental functioning. This fuels the lie that age-related disabilities mean worthless lives and discourages attempts to improve performance (e.g., the false belief that "bad memory" is a given in old age can reduce motivation even when memory exercises are helpful).
- **Set in Their Ways:** Implying older adults can't learn and grow. This discourages them (and caregivers) from engaging in new hobbies, activities, and ways of thinking (e.g., the racist older person and callous rich person stereotypes assume they can't evolve while absolving hateful behavior).
- **A Burden and Inept:** Falsely shown as less valuable employees, impeding company goals, only “support,” in outdated roles, and/or lessening job satisfaction for all. Inaccurately and too often shown as relying on younger people to help manage finances, health, social interactions, technology, etc. This fuels society's devaluing and marginalizing of older adults.
- **Magical and/or Sidekicks:** Imparting magical wisdom to younger characters; serving others but neglecting their own lives, dreams, and desires (e.g., kind, wise family oriented, generous grandparent with no social or romantic life).
- **Gendered Standards:** Older men portrayed as desirable (with much younger love interests), physically capable, and with agency. Alternatively, older women are shown without equal attributes, and older transgender and gender-expansive characters are virtually non-existent.
- **Severely Impaired:** Sick, fragile, sedentary, and/or mentally incapacitated. These portrayals are often far more severe than actual deficits and can deter older people from exercising their full potential.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

- **Reframed Aging & Beyond:** Driving their own nuanced stories specific to work, class, culture, etc., and applying their vast experiences to life's challenges. Storylines/dialogue about more than “getting older.” Physically/mentally evolving, engaged in normal life experiences (e.g., socializing, working, playing sports).
- **Sexually Active:** Dating, in relationships, and having sex, especially women and non-binary characters. Show storylines and intimate scenes as nuanced and explicit as for younger characters, reframing bodies and desirability from older adults' POVs.
- **Varied Experiences:** Characters across a range of identities (e.g., ethnicities, races, genders). Explore specific risks and impact on how people age and are treated in regards to healthcare, jobs, and social services (e.g., African Americans and Native Americans face race-related stressors).
- **Successful Professionals & Employees:** Depictions of highly successful, competitive, experienced, and visionary characters as powerful, active, healthy parts of diverse workforces (e.g., professors, retail salespeople, judges, government workers).
- **Joy:** Older adults with carefree, hopeful stories. Allow them to be funny and laugh at themselves (not be treated as punchlines) and have close, positive relationships with other characters of all ages.
- **The Truth About Ageism:** Address age discrimination (e.g., invisibility in society, lack of care, dismissed needs, elder abuse; barriers to retirement, Social Security*, Medicare*).
- **Long-Term Care*:** Explore long-term care needs (e.g., emotional, physical, financial) and stories about caregivers (e.g., health aides or adult children, who sometimes care for their kids *and* parents).
- **Community/Collective Care:** Stories of community care, especially characters who receive *and* provide care (e.g., grandparents caring for grandchildren and LGBTQIA+ adults in chosen families).



fact check:

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*Denotes a term in the glossary

QUICK FACTS

- ➔ 10,000 Americans turn 65 daily; by 2030, 1 in 5 will be 65+.
- ➔ 83% of Black and 90% of Latinx older adult households are expected to have insufficient resources to live out their remaining years, compared to 53% of white households.
- ➔ 4.5% of older adults live in nursing homes or long-term care facilities.
- ➔ By 2060, it's projected that there will be 98 million older U.S. adults.
- ➔ The U.S.'s 52+ million older adults have \$1.6 trillion spending power.
- ➔ Per a 2019 study, 25% of TV episodes had 2 or more older adult speaking characters; 19% had 2 or more older adult major characters.
- ➔ Those 65+ watch TV on average 50+ hours a week (vs. 31 hours/week average across adults of all ages).

ONLINE REFERENCES & RESOURCES:

- AARP: "[Media Image Landscape: Age Representation in Online Media](#)"
- AARP Public Policy Institute: "[Caregiving in the United States 2020](#)"
- American Psychological Association: "[African American Older Adults and Race-Related Stress](#)"
- U.S. Census Bureau: "[Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population](#)"
- FrameWorks Institute: "[Aging](#)"
- Genworth Financial: "[Genworth Cost of Care Survey 2019](#)"
- Harvard Business School: "[The Caring Company](#)"
- Hollywood Health & Society USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center: "[Rethink Aging](#)"
- Investopedia: "[The Most Popular Jobs for People 65 and Older](#)"
- Journal of Geriatrics: "[Stereotypes of Aging](#)"
- Lambda Legal: "[When Healthcare Isn't Caring](#)"
- National Community Reinvestment Coalition: "[Poor Old People](#)"
- National Research Council: "[When I'm 64](#)"
- Next Avenue: "[Shifting Gears to Retirement](#)"
- Population Reference Bureau: "[Fact Sheet: Aging in the United States](#)"
- Rutgers: "[Asian-Americans Face Barriers to Healthy Aging](#)"
- Suddenly Senior: "[Senior Citizen Facts, Figures, and Statistics \(2020 Update\)](#)"
- Slate: "[80 Over 80](#)"

GLOSSARY

Agesim:

The stereotyping, prejudice, and/or discrimination against people based on their age (across all ages). Ageism affects all aspects of our society, from the workplace (e.g., being fired from a job because of age) to healthcare (e.g., not being taken seriously by doctors because of age).

Long-Term Care:

A number of services that meet the medical and non-medical needs of older adults (as well as others with chronic illness or disability). These services include things like caregivers, long-term facilities (e.g., assisted-living homes and communities), home accessibility renovations (e.g., handrails and walk-in tubs), and physical and drug therapies.

Medicare:

A federal health insurance program for people 65+, certain younger people with disabilities, and people with other kinds of disease.

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH):

The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels.

Social Security:

An insurance program that provides retirement, disability, and survivors benefits run by the U.S. Social Security Administration.

Please visit our [Expanded Glossary](#) for in-depth definitions of the above terms and definitions of additional terms: **baby boomer, community care, pension, race-related stressors, and senior citizen.**

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CaringAcross.org



TheSCANFoundation.org



HollywoodHealthAndSociety.org



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A list of the most up-to-date contact information for all of our partner organizations can be found on our website: WriteInclusion.org/factsheets

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