



International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics

Volume 20, Number 1 (2023)

ISSN: [2790-6345](https://doi.org/10.1080/27906345)

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-100](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-100)

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Book Review

Ylänne, V. (Ed.). (2022). [Ageing and the media: International perspectives](#). Policy Press.

DOI: [10.55521/10-020-117](https://doi.org/10.55521/10-020-117)

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International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics • Volume 20(1), Copyright 2023 by IFSW

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This edited book is part of a larger collection, the *Ageing in a Global Context* book series, which seeks to influence research and policy; respond to the globalization of our world and subsequent transnational migration; and encourage new approaches to global aging across disciplines.

Ylänne introduces the text by framing the relationship between social discourse and the media as a reciprocal one: Representations of aging in the media reflect the attitudes and beliefs of society but also contribute to the social construction of meaning. Media producers have the power to influence, reinforce, or challenge ageism. This book addresses the intersectionalities of ageing with gender identities, cultural identities, nationalities, mental health, persons with LGBTQ+ identities, and persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to name a few. Authors explore not only how older adults are represented in the media, but how those older adults relate and respond to those representations. Authors explore the images and text of news coverage, magazines, fictional contexts, digital communications, and graphic novels. Research from Northern Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Africa is presented.

Loos et al. pointed out that the concept of successful aging is likely understood differently by different cultures and nationalities. Early in the book, I found it necessary to re-examine my own understanding of “successful ageing.” I learned that this concept is misleading because it portrays a model of aging that is not attainable by many people, and it implies that people are responsible for their own ageing. Consequently, people who are not able to age “successfully” must by logical extension, be failures at it by making the wrong choices. For example, Castro reported that Brazil’s advertising industry promotes the responsibility of older adults to “choose” not to age by buying certain anti-ageing products.

Higgs and Gilleard discuss the media in the UK and explain a tendency to divide older adults into two categories: third age and fourth age. The third age is comprised of the baby-boomer cohort that is healthy, active, physically fit, engaged in consumerism, and resistant to aging. This contrasts with the fourth age, who are seen as the inevitable “others” (p. 206) who are in decline, frail, chronically ill, dependent, and in need of care. Loos et al. examined images on the websites of public organizations in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden. They tended to portray third age people as healthy and active. Sweden portrayed fourth age people slightly more often as being frailer and more dependent. The authors suggested that this could have been because the websites were intended for different audiences, with the former addressing organizations that are financed by membership (trying to market an attractive image) and the latter addressing the general public and potential care workers (trying to show that older people are well cared for).

I particularly enjoyed reading about the linguistic choices and linguistic analyses presented. For example, in Ylänne’s review of the literature, a study discussed an analysis of newspaper headlines that referred to older adults in some way. The researchers found that in the headlines, the older adults were in a passive role and were usually the object of action by others (such as government, care agencies, or a virus). Seldom were they referred to in an active voice, being the people doing the action. When they were, they were described as “exceptional heroes” (p. 42). Chen

and Huang's review of Taiwanese newspapers identified use of language such as 'unable to,' "fail," and actions such as standing, walking, or lying down, were said to "limp, falter, behave in an absent-minded manner, or simply be 'spaced out.'" (p. 65). Language is a powerful and symbolic representation of our often-unacknowledged beliefs and attitudes.

In Canada, Hurd and Mahal found that a sample of newspaper and magazine articles revealed three themes: "silencing" LGBTQ+ older adults by quoting experts rather than quoting the words of the people being discussed, characterizing older LGBTQ+ persons as victims of institutional discrimination, and elevating LGBTQ+ older adults in before-and-after stories to the status of extraordinary, in prevailing over discrimination. Similarly, Loos et al. found that in the U.K., following the passage of legislation to promote inclusive design and make web pages more readable, there was a trend toward using more text and icons and fewer pictures. The unintended consequence of fewer pictures of older adults resulted in "erasing" them from visual imagery of public organizations (p. 208).

Ratzenböck researched women's participation with information technologies in Austria and found what was termed a "double logic of care" (p. 192). Women reported either using information technology to care for others, or reported that they were too busy caring for others to use information technology. In Canada, Sawchuk interviewed women who indicated that magazines intended for women were almost always intended for younger women, and they read the publications selectively so as to make them relevant to their lives despite the audience to which they were marketed.

Dalmer and Cedeira Serantes examined five titles of graphic novels from several countries. They found that the stories revealed a rich perspective of later life; explored a variety of themes; and contained characters reflecting multiple ethnicities, gender orientations, and life situations. This approach challenges the problematic and common tendency to rely upon binary categories of people.

Overall, I enjoyed the book and learned a lot. Two strengths of the book stand out. First, contributors represented different disciplines, interests,

and nationalities. For example, they included a social worker in Ghana whose interests are in women's empowerment and mental illness stigma, an associate professor in Taiwan whose interest is in gerontological sociolinguistics, and a data-set coordinator from Austria whose interest is in older adults in a digital media environment. Contributors were impressively talented and diverse. Second, each chapter is heavily cited and provides not only support for academic assertions, but sources for additional study. The book is interesting, but not an easy read. It would be an excellent text used at the graduate level for disciplines of social work, sociology, or media communications. I think undergraduate students would struggle getting through the book. It would also be an excellent resource for someone doing dissertation research in this area.