Reframing Aging

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Today’s Agenda

• Aging 101 REFRAMED
• Confronting Ageism
• Best communications practices to reframe aging
• Q & A
Why Framing Matters
Framing Is about Choices

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented.

- What to emphasize
- How to explain it
- What to leave unsaid
AGING 101

- Social construction of AGE
- Heterogeneity of the older population
- Multiple determinants of health
- Long lives, unequal distribution
- Age interacts with other risk factors
- Ageism hurts all of us
- Death rate is still 100%

A new lens on aging
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE
At what age does a person become “old”? 
A cross-national survey:
When does a person become old?

How old is old?

• Aging is a biological, psychological, and social phenomenon -- and chronological age is a poor indicator.

• Where did we get “65 years” any way??!

• Age is *socially constructed*: ideas about aging and “old” are created by society and culture more than by biology
The frame

We invented what it means to be OLD -- we can reinvent it.
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging

Heterogeneity of the older population
Heterogeneity

• There is great variation within the older population.

• Consider the differences between someone 65 and someone 85 (often termed ‘the elderly’).

• What about the difference between one 80-year-old and another?

• How to avoid this overgeneralization?
Percentage of medicare beneficiaries age 65 and over who 1-2 limitations in performing activities of daily living (ADL), by age group, 2017

- 85+: 26%
- 75-84: 18.9%
- 65-74: 12.6%
WHAT PERCENT OF ADULTS 65+
DO NOT HAVE THIS CONDITION?

86% do not have heart failure
69% do not have arthritis
89% do not have pulmonary disease
89% do not have Alz or dementia

These percentages vary a lot by age group
Percent of 65+ population with NO DISABILITY

Administration on Aging, 2021
The frame

We can’t treat people over the age of 65 as a monolithic group.

There exists disability …..as well as much capacity.

Tell the full story; tell an accurate story
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
Vast variation: Tell a fuller, more accurate story

Multiple determinants of health
Factors affecting health

Figure 3. Factors Contributing to Premature Death

- Social Circumstances: 40%
- Behavioral Patterns: 30%
- Environmental Exposure: 15%
- Health Care: 10%
- Genetic Predisposition: 5%

The aging process

Physiological Deterioration
- Need prevention and maintenance
- Need redesign of health care and built environments to support function
- Need long-term care (not only acute)
- Need to support caregiving

Primary Aging, biological aging

Crimmins et al. (2011)
The frame

We can manipulate the most powerful factors that produce long and healthy lives.

We can design for longer life (policies, programs, expectations, attitudes).
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
Vast variation: Tell a fuller, more accurate story
Multiple determinants: Design for health

Long lives, unequal distribution
The average life expectancy in the United States in 2020 is:

A. 71.8
B. 74.2
C. 77
D. 79.8
The average life expectancy in the United States is:

A. 71.8 Black Males
B. 74.2 Males
C. 77.0
D. 79.9 Females
We are living longer

Life expectancy (from birth) in the United States, from 1860 to 2020
We are not all living as long

Exhibit 1. Life expectancy at birth in the U.S. by sex, race, and ethnicity, 1940–2017
The frame

We have doubled life expectancy in the last 120 years --- a great accomplishment in human history.

But disparities are substantial (around the globe, within our country, within our region).

How can we reshape society to maximize this extension of life while reducing disparities?
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
Vast variation: Tell a fuller, more accurate story
Multiple determinants of health: Design for health
Long lives, unequal distribution: Maximize the gift, for everyone

Age interacts with other risk factors
It is never ‘just age’

“Multiple jeopardy”: age interacts with SES, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc. to affect life experiences and outcomes.

Portray the older population in all of its diversity and expand the common image of economically secure, relatively healthy older people, living a life of leisure.
The frame

People with all types of risk-factors grow old and accumulate a lifetime of experiences related to these circumstances.

Ensure that marginalized populations do not become more marginalized when they enter later life.
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
Vast variation: Tell a fuller, more accurate story
Multiple determinants of health: Design for health
Long lives, unequal distribution: Maximize the gift, for everyone
It’s never just ‘old age’: Prevent accumulating disadvantage

Ageism is pervasive and hurts all of us
Narrative: Age as Deficit
What is Ageism?

- Ageism refers to **discrimination** (how people act), **prejudice** (how people feel) & **stereotyping** (how people think) based on age.

- Like other isms, ageism begins in childhood and is reinforced over the course of one’s life.

- Unlike other isms, ageism in later life will be something everyone will face.

Types of Ageism

- **Explicit** (observable)
- **Implicit** (without conscious awareness)
- **External** (perpetuated by others)
- **Internalized** (perpetuated by self)
- **Compassionate** (meaning well)
- **Institutional/Structural** (practices/policies)

“Millennials have an inflated sense of entitlement”
“Old people go there”
“She is too young to be a manager”
“She looks so good for her age”
“Wow! You don’t look 70”
“50 is the new 30”
“I was having a senior moment”

Reframing Aging
How Prevalent is Ageism?

Experiences with everyday ageism among adults age 50–80

82%
Experienced one or more forms of everyday ageism in their day-to-day lives

65%
Exposure to ageist messages

45%
Ageism in interpersonal interactions

36%
Internalized ageism

*Note: Percentages reflect responses of either often/sometimes or strongly agree/agree to forms of ageism.

National Poll on Healthy Aging: University of Michigan, July 2020
Ageism hurts all of us

- **Impairs health**
  - leads to poor physical health
  - leads to worse health behaviors
  - delays recovery from disability
  - negatively affects mental health
  - reduces overall quality of life
  - costs society billions of dollars in health care costs.\(^{20}\)

- Reduces income and retirement security
- Leads to dissatisfaction and discouragement in workplace
- Increases conflict between generations
- Inhibits research and training on aging and ageism itself.

Chang et al. 2020
The frame

Ageism is pervasive and harmful to individuals and society……a major barrier to achieving long, fulfilling lives

And ageism can be identified and confronted
AGING 101

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
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Multiple determinants of health: Design for health
Long lives, unequal distribution: Maximize the gift, for everyone
It’s never just ‘old age’: Prevent accumulating disadvantage
Ageism is pervasive and hurts all of us: Confront it

Death rate is still 100%
The aging process

Compression of morbidity

Physiological Deterioration

Diseases & Conditions

Frailty & Disability

Death

Primary Aging, biological aging

Crimmins et al. (2011)
The frame

Most all of us will experience chronic conditions and disability; and death is universal.

There are real limits to human life and functioning; but we have created artificial limits.

Remove the ARTIFICIAL limits so we can deal with REAL limits better.
AGING 101: Reframed

Social construction of AGE: Reinvent aging
Vast variation: Tell a fuller, more accurate story
Multiple determinants: Design for health
Long lives, unequal distribution: Maximize the gift, for everyone
It is never ‘just old age’: Prevent accumulating disadvantage
Ageism is pervasive and hurts all of us: Confront it
Death rate is still 100%: Real versus artificial limits
We can counter ageism
AGEISM CAN BE COMBATTED

POLICY AND LAW can protect human rights and address age discrimination and inequality

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES can transmit knowledge and skills and enhance empathy

INTERGENERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS can connect people of different generations

#AWorld4AllAges
Resources at WashU

- Ageism Infographic
- Understanding and Confronting Ageism:
  - Background Paper
- Age Inclusive Language Guidelines
- Issue Briefs on Aging Topics
- Workshop on ageism

Visit [publichealth.wustl.edu/centers/aging/aging-resources](publichealth.wustl.edu/centers/aging/aging-resources) to access these and additional resources.
National & International Campaigns to end Ageism

- World Health Organization Global Campaign to Combat Ageism
- Gerontological Society of America’s National Center to Reframe Aging
- AARP Disrupt Aging Classroom
Reframing Aging

A Social Change Endeavor designed to improve the public’s understanding of aging

@ReframingAging

Original research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and sponsored by the Leaders of Aging Organizations
Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO)
Nonprofit think tank with the mission to advance the nonprofit sector’s capacity to reframe social issues

Conducts original, scholarly research on the communications aspects of social and scientific issues

Recognized in 2015 with the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions

Concepts presented today w/ permission, courtesy of the Reframing Aging Initiative and the FrameWorks Institute
Why Framing Matters
Thinking about Getting Older: Before
Why we need to reframe aging

- Embrace: How should we approach aging?
- Environments: What determines outcomes and who is responsible?
- Important concern: How big of a concern is ageism?
- Plenty: What can be done to ensure wellbeing in older age?
- Central: What is the role of public policy?

Public:
- Battle: Embrace
- Individuals: Embrace
- Absent from thinking: Embrace
- Nothing much: Embrace
- Limited role: Embrace
How Does Reframing Work?

- Changes in Communication lead to
- Changes in Discourse lead to
- Changes in Thinking lead to
- Changes in Behavior lead to
- Changes in Policy and Practice
REFRAMING AGING INITIATIVE
COUNTERING AGEISM BY CHANGING HOW WE TALK ABOUT AGING
Words Matter
Words matter

Finding the Frame: An Empirical Approach to Reframing Aging and Ageism
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

1. Use Language That Is Inclusive and Free of Age Bias
US (younger)  

THEM (older)
US ........ THEM
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

2. Highlight the Diversity That Exists in the Older Population
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

3. Talk Affirmatively About Changing Demographics
4. Emphasize Collective Responsibility and Social Context

**Individualism**
- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning

**Super Senior**
- “Aging well” is determined by individual choices.
- “Positive aging” only means doing extraordinary things late in life.
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

5. Talk About Aging as a Dynamic Process That Can Benefit Society

Before

After

Age Strong Shuttle Redesign
AGING.

SO COOL THAT EVERYBODY’S DOING IT!

AGE-FRIENDLY WORTHINGTON

worthington.org/agefriendly
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

6. Always Define Ageism When You Use the Term

AGEISM: Discrimination against persons of a certain age group, especially older adults

- Stereotypes (how we think)
- Prejudices (how we feel)
- Discrimination (how we act)

It can be:

- Interpersonal
- Compassionate
- Institutional
- Self-directed
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

7. Include Concrete, Systems-Level Solutions

- Community centers with intergenerational programs
- Advisory committees that require diversity of ages
- Transportation systems that include bus stops in front of senior centers, libraries
- Age-neutral workplace policies on hiring and advancement
COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

8. Incorporate the Concepts of Justice and Ingenuity
### Quick Start Guide

**Our Words Matter**

**Here Are Tips on How to Choose Them Well**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of these words and cues</th>
<th>Try:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Tidal wave,” “tsunami,” and similarly catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people</td>
<td>Talking affirmatively about changing demographics: “As Americans live longer and healthier lives...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Choice,” “planning,” “control,” and other individual determinants of aging outcomes</td>
<td>Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: “Let’s find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Seniors,” “elderly,” “aging dependents,” and similar “other-ing” terms that stoke stereotypes</td>
<td>Using more neutral (“older people/Americans”) and inclusive (“we” and “us”) terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Struggle,” “battle,” “fight” and similar conflict-oriented words to describe aging experiences</td>
<td>The Building Momentum metaphor: “Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with our communities.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the word “ageism” without explanation</td>
<td>Defining ageism: “Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.”</td>
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<td>Making generic appeals to the need to “do something” about aging</td>
<td>Using concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions</td>
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In a JUST society, everyone can participate.
When I’m 64
Transforming Your Future
A class about (and with) “old” people