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

ReframingAging.org
@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
Ageism is not publicly recognized as a problem

Ageism leads to social injustice and unequal treatment or exclusion. Ageism begins with biases that are implicit and unseen.

Common, unproductive assumptions about ageism:
• Ageism is less serious than other forms of discrimination
• Ageism is not considered a policy issue
• Ageism is impossible to address
The Good News

- Positive self-perception leads to 7.5 years longer, healthier lifespan

- Older persons with **positive** age beliefs who carry one of the strongest genes for developing dementia were nearly 50% less likely to develop the disease than their peers who held negative beliefs.

https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0191004

Fig 1. Positive age beliefs associated with resisting dementia among participants with APOE ε4 and all participants.
Positive views on aging
AMONG ADULTS AGE 50–80

88% Feel more comfortable being themselves
80% Have a strong sense of purpose
67% Feel more positive about aging
65% Think their life is better than they thought it would be

Learn more: www.healthyagingpoll.org  |  Contact us: healthyaging@umich.edu
How we talk about aging is important – aka Framing
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
What does it take to reframe an issue?

Map the terrain

Develop a strategy to navigate to higher ground

Build a caravan, equip the travelers, and start moving
Public Understanding About Aging
Aging populations pose a challenge to the fiscal and macroeconomic stability of many societies through increased government spending on pension, healthcare, and social benefits programs for the elderly. This may hurt economic growth and overall quality of life if governments need to divert public spending from education and infrastructure investment to finance programs for the elderly.

I am tired of all of the taxes I pay being used to help other people. I am struggling too because I am taking care of my older family members. People need to stop depending on the government for taking care of their responsibilities. And I need to see benefits now of all those taxes I pay.
Cultural Models Drive People’s Thinking

• Cultural models are patterns of thinking created through years of experience and expectation.

• They are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.

• People rely on cultural models to interpret, organize and make meaning out of all sorts of stimuli, including experiences, feelings, thoughts ... and your communications.
The Swamp of Aging
What patterns of thinking about aging did you hear in this video?
What is in the swamp of...

**Aging**

**Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”**
- Accumulated Wisdom
- Self-sufficiency
- Staying active
- Earned leisure
- Deterioration
- Loss of control
- Dependency
- Determinism

**“Us” vs. “Them”**
- Older as “other”
- Zero sum
- Digital incompetence

**Solutions**
- Fatalism/Crisis—nothing can be done
- Better individual choices and planning
- More education and information

**Problems can be solved**

**What Surrounds Us Shapes Us**

**Individualism**
- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning

**What is in the swamp of...**

**Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity**
- Family dispersal
- Economic challenges
- Social Security is doomed

**Collective Responsibility**
What is in the swamp of...

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Challenges, aka Alligators

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Ideal vs. Perceived Real

Ideal
• Accumulated Wisdom
• Self-sufficiency
• Staying active
• Earned leisure

Example:
“One of the advantages of getting older is you get to relax more.”
Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”

Perceived “Real”
• Deterioration
• Loss of control
• Dependency
• Determinism

Example:
“Getting older means that you have more health issues, which means more doctor’s visits and medications”
Us vs. Them

- Older as “other”
- Zero sum
- Digital incompetence

Example:
“We cannot support everyone, if we increase support for older people, we won’t be able to support the needs of others”
Kudos to @GovMikeDeWine for #ReframingAging in question about vaccine access! Q: When can average Ohioans get the vaccine? A: "I think a lot of the people who are getting the vaccine now consider themselves average Ohioans." @ReframingAging

Feb 4, 2021 #COVID19 Update with Governor Mike DeWine
Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted will hold a media availability today at 2:00 p.m. to give an update on the status of the Coronavirus ... youtube.com
Individualism

• Lifestyle choices
• Financial planning

Examples

• “To age well all you have to do is exercise and eat healthy”
• “You have to ensure you’re saving enough money to be able to retire, poor decisions now will have consequences later.”
Solutions

• Fatalism/Crisis—nothing can be done
• Better individual choices and planning
• More education and information

Examples:
• “The “silver tsunami” is coming and we’re not prepared”
• “We need to teach young people how to make better health and financial choices, so they’re prepared”
Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity

• Family dispersal
• Economic challenges
• Social Security is doomed

Examples:
• “Older people have to be able to pay to take care of themselves, especially when family isn’t close by anymore”
• “In the good old days...”
What is in the swamp of...
Aging

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Individualism
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“By 2030, adults 65 years and older will make up nearly 25% of Ohio’s population, up from 14% today. This dramatic change in life span is a cause for both celebration and concern. The massive numbers of the “oldest old” will unleash a torrent of Medicaid spending that threatens the state treasury. The burden falls to Medicaid because many individuals deplete their assets to pay for long-term care that Medicare doesn’t cover.”
Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”
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What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

Collective Responsibility

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Problems can be solved
Aging

What is in the swamp of...

Opportunities a.k.a. Orchids

- What Surrounds Us Shapes Us
- Collective Responsibility
- Problems can be solved
What Part of the Swamp (Orchids) Might This Message Cue?

“How well we thrive as we age is really a question of how well-equipped our communities are to tap into this resource by enabling us to be engaged participants. Everyone is more likely to enjoy positive aspects of aging like good health, personal growth, longevity and expanded productivity if we start to think a little differently about how we shape the places we live.

Area Agency on Aging programs provide dignity, self-determination, and quality of live for us as we age. We must ensure adequate funding and system resources are dedicated to the full spectrum of supports to enable us to live healthy, engaged and secure lives and access the supports we need in our homes and communities.”
What to avoid

• Don’t lead a story with demographic shifts; don’t say silver tsunami or age wave or crisis messaging
• Don’t use language that refers to older people as “other”
• Pay attention to pronouns. Example: Change “what older people need” to “what we need when we are older.”
• Don’t be overly positive.
Avoid
• Individual action drives aging outcomes
• Aging is the process of decline
• Older people as other
• Aging (population) is a crisis
• Fixed, finite resources
• Just another -ism

Advance
• Context shapes decisions and outcomes
• Future is a time for improvement
• We are all better off by being inclusive
• Interventions can change outcomes
• Solution stories: systems, supports
• How ageism works
Old Think

Any Story Will Do

New Think

What Will That Story Do?
Telling a New Story about Aging
Explanatory Metaphors Help You Navigate the Swamp

• Using metaphors to explain works because we think in metaphor

• Metaphors channel attention to certain features of an issue and redirect attention away from others

• Metaphors help people remember important points

• Metaphors are sticky and pass easily from person to person
Building Momentum
The story you are telling:
As we get older we gather momentum, which powers us to take up new ideas and advance toward common goals. This energy powers up our society and helps move our communities forward.

Redirect away from
• Us versus them
• Aging as discrete categories
• Decline and deterioration
• Aging as a “battle” or “fight”
• Dependency

Move thinking towards
• Aging as opportunity
• Policies support well-being as we age
• Collective benefits accrue older people can contribute
Framing Practice

*Using Building Momentum Creatively*
Building Momentum in Practice

Before

After

Age Strong Shuttle Redesign
“America’s aging population is not in decline, as the outdated paradigm of the arch of aging suggests, but rather entering what has come to be known as life’s third act.”

--Jane Fonda
Building Momentum in Practice

https://changingthenarrativeco.org/anti-ageist-birthday-card-gallery/
What can I do?

Practice using the tips on the Quick Start Guide

Learn about the Swamp of Public Opinion on Aging and other research on the Reframing Aging Initiative webpage (www.reframingaging.org)

Take the Implicit Association Test to measure your implicit bias (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html)

Call out ageism when you see it or hear it

Request a workshop or presentation for your organization

www.reframingaging.org
Welcome to the latest edition of Caravan. This bi-monthly newsletter shares information, ideas, and inspiration to help our fellow travellers on our journey to improve the public’s understanding of what aging means and the contributions older people bring to society.

News + Articles

Partnership with LiveOn NY Trains New Cohort of Reframers

The Reframing Aging Initiative welcomes its newest partner: LiveOn NY, an advocacy and direct service organization that represents 100 member agencies who serve older people in the NYC area. With funding from the Fan Fan and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, LiveOn NY has embarked on a multi-year strategy to employ reframed communications to counteract ageism and improve the way policymakers, stakeholders, and the public think about aging and older people. New York City currently is home to more than 1.6 million people over the age of 60 living across the five boroughs.

Under the new partnership, the Reframing Aging Initiative is training a cohort of 50
Reframing Aging Research and Resources
www.reframingaging.org

Compares the public’s perception of aging with that of aging experts and explains how the disconnect presents challenges for building support.

Identifies six narratives dominating conversation in the media and in advocacy organizations.

Explains the process and research behind the evidence-based narratives shown to improve attitudes about aging.

Access this free Video Series to hear the research findings and learn how to apply the reframing aging tools.
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