



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

On the limits of communication: the liminal positioning of older adults and processes of self-ageism and ageism

Schuurman, B.; Achterberg, W.P.; Abma, T.A.; Lindenberg, J.

Citation

Schuurman, B., Achterberg, W. P., Abma, T. A., & Lindenberg, J. (2024). On the limits of communication: the liminal positioning of older adults and processes of self-ageism and ageism. *Journal Of Aging Studies*, 71. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2024.101255

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4245339>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



On the limits of communication: The liminal positioning of older adults and processes of self-ageism and ageism.

B. Schuurman^{a,b,*}, W.P. Achterberg^a, T.A. Abma^{a,c}, J. Lindenberg^{a,c}

^a Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Leiden University Medical Center, Postbus 9600, 2300 RC Leiden, Netherlands

^b Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, Postbus 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, Netherlands

^c Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing, Rijnsburgerweg 10, 2333 AA Leiden, Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Age identification
Communication
Social identity
Liminality
Self-ageism

ABSTRACT

Our qualitative study, consisting of in-depth semi-structured interviews with recent retirees in the Dutch city of Leiden, set out to investigate how communication, through processes of self-identification and the negotiation of social identities, relates to (self-)ageism. A letter from the city administration was used to make age identification salient in our research and prompted stories of various liminal spaces and phases that our participants experienced. Whilst liminal phases are usually considered uncertain and ambiguous, in our study we found that for older people liminality can offer a desired ambiguity that allowed them to adopt a more positive identity than 'being old', which was rejected as undesirable. Our findings provide insight into the intertwinement of societal, institutional and individual levels of ageism and highlights the necessity of finding and emphasising positive values in being old, since only then positive interpretations of communication can enable processes of positive societal identification.

Introduction

Prejudices, negative stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviour regarding older people are commonly used to designate ageism against older people. The presence of ageism can be identified at individual, the institutional, and the societal levels (Bodner, 2009), and these levels are intertwined: perceptions on the societal and institutional levels shape those at the individual level and vice versa. Also in The Netherlands, the setting of this study, ageism has been shown to be widespread at all three of these levels (Otten et al., 2015).

The origins of this ageism have been explained by various theoretical frameworks, such as by terror management theory (Martens et al., 2005) and social identity theory (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). In younger people, terror management theory has been most widely researched and evidenced. This theory posits that anxiety about death and dying leads to the rejection of those reminding us of this anxiety, namely older people (Bodner, 2009; Martens et al., 2005). Ageist attitudes towards older people are not only held by younger generations but also by older people themselves – a phenomenon called self-ageism. Self-ageism in older people is hypothesised to be better explained by the internalisation of ageist attitudes throughout the life course (Kotter-Gröhn & Hess,

2012; McConatha et al., 2003) and by social identity theory (Bodner, 2009; Kite & Wagner, 2002; Lev et al., 2018). Social identity theory posits that older people experience their own social group (their age group) as being of lower standing and prestige compared to other age groups; this might lead to negative perceptions of their own social group and self-ageism (Hogg, 2000; Lev et al., 2018). There is some evidence that older people with the ability to relate positively to themselves and others have less self-ageist attitudes, whereas people who lack this ability show higher levels of self-ageism and show a tendency to distinguish themselves from their own age group (Bodner & Cohen-Fridel, 2010). However, as mechanisms of self-ageism are still unclear, in this article we explore this further by looking into how older people navigate and negotiate social identities. More specifically, we investigate how their ability to relate positively to their own social identities pertains to (perceived) ageism and self-ageism.

There is an abundance of evidence that ageist language and attitudes are ubiquitous in everyday life and communication (Gendron et al., 2016; Hurd Clarke, 2010; Nussbaum et al., 2005) and have detrimental effects on well-being and health (Levy, 2003; Levy et al., 2008; Levy & Macdonald, 2016). On an individual level, as well as in institutional and societal contexts, ageism is often expressed through language (Bodner,

* Corresponding author at: Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, Postbus 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, Netherlands.

E-mail addresses: b.schuurman@fsw.leidenuniv.nl (B. Schuurman), w.p.achterberg@lumc.nl (W.P. Achterberg), abma@leydenacademy.nl (T.A. Abma), lindenberg@leydenacademy.nl (J. Lindenberg).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2024.101255>

Received 10 October 2022; Received in revised form 19 August 2024; Accepted 21 August 2024

Available online 28 August 2024

0890-4065/© 2024 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Inc. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

2009; Palmore et al., 2005). Sometimes, this is rather explicit and easily recognized in the use of patronising language or attempts at ageist jokes. Often, though, in line with the ambivalent nature of ageism, it is more hidden and implicit, exhibiting itself in the communication of age norms, age denial, negative assumptions about the ageing process and public policies that hold ageist assumptions or patronise older persons (Ayalon et al., 2021; Palmore et al., 2005). In line with these insights on the importance of communication, especially over the last four decades several hypotheses have been developed about how to improve the (self) images of certain groups in society. It is suggested that positive self-images among older people can be stimulated by enabling positive self-identification through communication that emphasises age diversity and the social value of older people (Berner, 2011; Coupland & Coupland, 1993). Vice versa, if age-positive communication is theorised to trigger the ability for positive self-identification and more positive perceptions of social identities, then ageist communication might also trigger processes of negative self-identification and lead to negative perceptions of social identities. These suggestions have not been thoroughly researched and raise questions about the relationship between self-ageism and communication that formed the basis for the question we explore in this article: how might communication enable or hinder processes of positive self-identification for older people?

The starting point of this study was a letter from the city administration of Leiden, the Netherlands, targeting recent retirees with the goal of involving them in volunteer work. This letter made age identification salient in our research. We specifically target this group of retirees, as retirement is a life phase where people, in particular, encounter numerous assumptions about ageing, including ageist assumptions on the individual, institutional, and societal levels. Moreover, in terms of social identity, the group of newly retired citizens is particularly interesting. They are often referred to as the 'young old', or the third age by those who advocate for a conceptual division between the third and fourth ages (Higgs & Gilleard, 2015). They can be and often are considered people who are in the process of shifting their social identities: from professional identities to retirees, from middle-aged persons to older persons. In lived experiences of ageing and ageism, people's chronological age, perceptions of age groups, and bodily ageing are often conflated, and this tends to be reflected in the social sciences (Rennes, 2019). Given that conflation, theoretically approaching newly retired citizens as third agers in the cultural and social imaginary (Higgs & Gilleard, 2021) might prove useful, given that our recent retirees are all confronted with an age boundary that is set by the state and ingrained in societal perceptions: a predetermined retirement age for the state pension. Though such an approach might indeed be helpful for those interested in commonalities and the causality of ageism (Higgs & Gilleard, 2021), it might also obscure the diversity of experiences and perceptions of social identities outside that imaginary. As Kaufman (1993) pointed out, at least similarly important as social events and change - even rather radical life changes as retirement - are the ways in which these events are interpreted by older people themselves and used to shape their social identities.

Aiming to understand the diversity of lived experiences and perceptions as shaping relations instead of untangling causality, we explicitly opted for qualitative research using an interpretive grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The anthropological concept of liminality as developed by van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1969) helps us to further delve into the fluid ways in which ageing people navigate and make sense of their social identities in times and spaces of uncertainty and change, through constant processes of distancing, adapting and redefining. Using the received letter as a means to draw attention to age identity in semi-structured in-depth interviews, we explore the perceptions that older citizens might have about communication that explicitly targets their ascribed age group, how these perceptions are linked to (ageist) images that older citizens hold of themselves, and who they regard as their age group, as well as perceived societal views of older people, including societal ageism and neoliberal

notions of productivity and ageing (Ishikawa, 2022). With the resulting insights, we aim to contribute to a gap in ageism research - in qualitative empirical insights into the diverse lived experiences and perceptions that shape how communication, through processes of self-identification and the negotiation of social identities, relates to (self-)ageism.

Methods

A letter from the city administration of Leiden, the Netherlands, was used to make age identification in communication salient for this study. The letter included an invitation for recent retirees to attend an information and orientation event for volunteer work. The event title '*Leiden voor Gevorderden*,' which roughly translates into 'Leiden for the advanced,' points to the advanced age and life experience of the invited senior citizens. The goal of the event is, according to the invitation by the city administration, to inform senior citizens about volunteer opportunities in and around their hometown of Leiden and to stimulate taking part in volunteer work in general. The local welfare organisation and the city administration were responsible for organising and facilitating the event. It was the twelfth consecutive year in which the event was organised, and, as its organisers informed us, these yearly events mainly draw a higher educated, white audience.

Participant recruitment and research population

The city administration attached our research invitation to their event invitations. The research invitation consisted of a short explanatory letter about our study and a reply card for those interested in participating. The event invitation itself consisted of 2 parts: a flyer written by the local welfare organisation for senior citizens and an explanatory recommendation letter written by the city administration on behalf of the municipal executive councillor for Social Affairs.¹

The invitation was distributed by the city administration to all senior citizens in the municipality of Leiden who turned 66 or 67 years old in 2017. This corresponds to the retirement age and the age upon which older adults receive their state pension for the first time, which is yearly rising in the Netherlands and was set at 65 years and 8 months in 2017. To avoid sending invitations to people who will be moving or have passed away in the meantime, the invitation is usually sent relatively shortly (approximately two weeks) before the event takes place. In 2017, a total of 2354 invitations were sent and approximately 150 people actually attended the event.

Prospective research participants had the opportunity to express their interest or request more information about the study by phone, e-mail, or regular mail (by returning the pre-stamped reply card). The researchers themselves were also present at the information and orientation event to give potential participants the opportunity to ask questions and express their interest in person. A total number of 49 senior citizens who received the invitation and three experts of the organising organisations participated in our semi-structured interview study. The interviewed participants were offered a payment of 25 euros to compensate for their time and effort. Twenty-two participants identified as female, and twenty-seven as male. The research participants had widely varying backgrounds regarding education (ranging from primary education to university), socio-economic background (below state pension up to more than twice average Dutch income), work situation (employed, self-employed, retired), civil status and family life (e.g. single, divorced, committed distance relationships, with (grand)children, nuclear family) and migration experiences (e.g. born in another country or temporary migration to another country in the past). All

¹ Since the invitations prominently included names, photographs and personal (contact) details of municipality staff as well as older volunteers, the invitation letter and flyer cannot be added as supplementary material to this article due to privacy concerns.

participants were 66 or 67 years old at the time of the interviews, which took place in 2017 and 2018.

Data collection and ethical considerations

Semi-structured interviews, lasting 60 min on average (range 44 min to four hours) were conducted with the participants in the period from December 2017 to February 2018. Interviews took place either in the researcher's office space or in the participant's home, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews were conducted one-on-one and in private, except for two participants who were married and requested to be interviewed together, and one participant who invited a significant other during the interview. In both cases, this request was honoured to make the participants as comfortable as possible during the interview. The invited partners of the participants became participants themselves and went through the same procedures of informed consent. During the interviews, questions were asked about their personal backgrounds, their impressions of the invitation, their experiences regarding all kinds of communication (written, in conversation, media etc.) as they age, and how these impressions and experiences relate to their self-identification as an older person, their images of older people as well as society's (perceived) images of older people. People were asked explicitly about parts of the event invitation specifically and communication in general which they appreciated or disliked, their motivations for doing so, and recommendations for improvement. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Before the interview, the purpose and research process of the study was explained, anonymity issues were discussed and informed, and written consent was given to record the interview and to participate in the study. To ensure both confidentiality and transparency in our study, participants could choose their own pseudonym or fictional initials. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, except for one participant who preferred to be interviewed in English. Although two participants had limited literacy, they were able to fill out the consent form with limited assistance from the researcher and sign the forms themselves. Two of the participants had mental health issues that became apparent during the interview through incoherent speech and obvious confusion. These participants received their due compensation, yet because their mental health issues ultimately might have affected their ability to consent, after careful consideration we decided to not include these interviews in the analysis.

We held additional open interviews with three experts connected to either the city administration or the local welfare organisation for seniors. These interviews primarily focused on their involvement with the project and opinions and experiences regarding communicating with senior citizens. For our research, these interviews served the purpose of gaining background information about the set-up and the intentions of the project. One of these interviews took place at the researcher's office and was also recorded, while two expert interviews took place in shared meeting places and could not be recorded. Informed consent was given beforehand in all cases.

Analysis

The interview data were coded and analysed using qualitative analysis software (MaxQDA 2020). A second researcher coded and assisted in enhancing the analysis and checking interpretations against the data. Based on our main research questions and given our focus on a diversity of lived experiences and perceptions of ageing and ageism, our analysis started out as data-driven in accordance with a grounded theory approach. We then moved towards a more inductive, iterative conceptual approach using the concepts identified in the first coding phase, guided by our data as well as by literature and theory.

Results

To get a sense of the diverse personal backgrounds, perceptions of social identities and ageing experiences of the participants, they were all - before discussing the invitation letter - invited to tell us something about themselves and their personal backgrounds. The extent and contents of this personal and background information were left up to the participants, to allow them to identify what mattered regarding their identities and experiences. Participants reacted with a diverse array of stories about their education, work life, and their current living situation - yet the transition to retirement and the process of ageing were the main topics in these stories and therefore the themes that prominently informed and are featured in our analysis as well.

Experiences of transitioning into retirement

The process of retirement was experienced by our participants in daily routines, in social status, in social circles, in personal finances, and in places. Some long anticipated these changes, gradually transitioning into this new life phase with part-time retirement or the preceding retirement of an older partner. Participants who continued paid labour - for financial reasons or because they liked to stay active in their professions - appreciated that retirement gave them a basic level of financial stability and the option to work if they wanted and how often they wanted to do so (i.e., sense of freedom).² Luigi, who does not plan to stop working in his legal profession any time soon, stated: "It's now a kind of working therapy, and I get paid well for it, so that's great." Hof, who kept working part-time at the request of his employer, notes that he had to take some time to deliberate about this when he reached the retirement age because "you can retire and keep working nowadays".

While hard physical labour, diminished pleasure in their jobs due to stress, increased bureaucracy and change in job tasks were cited as reasons to look forward to retirement, there were also those who did not positively anticipate retirement and had remained somewhat bitter about approaching the retirement age. Some described how they had to spend their last working years before retirement feeling stressed and down about unemployment, feeling undervalued or in conflict with employers or government institutions. In general, though, retirement was mentioned in terms of relief, freedom and self-determination. Miep, who retired at age 62 after selling her veterinary practice, got fed up with the administrative bureaucracy of her job and was happy to retire early. She pointed out that too many people don't have the time to do the things they really want to do in life when they're still working, regardless of their age, and noted that retirement offered her an opportunity to do more of the things she wanted. Similarly, Gerard, who experienced years of task changes in his job and had longstanding conflicts with his employer, even called the offer of early retirement (with minimal loss of benefits) that his pension fund sent him a "liberation", because he could now tell his employer that he could stop working any day. He actually kept working part-time to save money for a caravan, but merely the offer of retirement gave him choice and leverage in a previously powerless position. Anna, who found that her financial situation worsened after retirement, accepted a new job to better her income, but also enjoyed the freedom of self-employment, which allowed her to work mostly on her own terms. The participants were aware many people in society associate retirement with old age and unproductivity. Aaf returned to her old teaching job to assist after a year of retirement and noticed that people asked her: "I thought you were retired? What are you doing here?" as if

² Most people who live or work in the Netherlands can get a basic state pension. It is reduced for each year the receiver was living or working outside of the Netherlands and the maximum amount depends on if a person lives alone or with a partner. Building up supplementary pension is often possible through employers or a private pension insurance. The pension age depends on the date of birth and is gradually rising each year, but always set by the state.

she was not supposed to be at the workplace, she felt it hinted at that she might now be part of an older, unproductive group in society.

Some participants had not given much consideration to retirement before retiring and were still strongly attached to their previous professional identities. This became most obvious during interviews in which participants would not stop talking about their professional lives and kept bringing up their professional identities and anecdotes about their paid working lives. Lukas mentioned that the moment he received the letter with instructions for a state pension was “weird”: “Now ‘it’ starts, now I’ll be getting AOW (state pension)”. He felt he was “in a phase of denial” about being an older retiree and stated that he hoped to remain in that phase for a long time. His referring to a new life phase as ‘it’ perhaps highlights this denial. For Lukas, his feelings can be related to his position of being old but not feeling like an older person at all: “I feel like I’m just 30. I just finished my studies, I just had my first two jobs, now I’m making a career. Being busy, then suddenly you’re 65.” He clung to his professional identity as this allowed him to keep perceiving himself as a young, productive member of society. These experiences illustrate that the transition to retirement can be experienced in diverse ways yet commonly involves shifts in social identities, either desired or denied.

‘In-betweens’

Most participants state that they do not feel old yet; instead, they explain how and why they are ‘in-betweens’, that is, in-between young and old: not young anymore but not old yet. If they feel like they belong to the group of older people, there is still a distinction made between the younger old such as themselves and the “really old” or the generations above them. Regarding this, participants refer to physical appearance and confrontational moments where they suddenly realise they are not seen or approached as a young person anymore, such as a moment when people ask them if they are still working or if they are retired, or the moment that they receive the letter with instructions for receiving a state pension, or a letter explicitly inviting recent retirees to do volunteer work, like the letter participants in our study received.

Participants compared themselves to older generations and described what they saw as characteristics of belonging to the social groups of ‘old’ and ‘young’ people. They stressed why they did not belong to those social groups themselves or did not yet feel like they belonged to the group of older people despite not feeling young anymore. A participant explained that when she looks at her adult son, she thinks, “am I really that old already? Yes, apparently so. I do not feel like that.” Interviewees are continuously shifting the threshold of when they would regard themselves as being old upwards. We found that this threshold was primarily shaped by their ideas of how much physical and mental disability would allow them to still be productive and contribute. Being old had an undesirable connotation for them, layered with images and stories of dependency and care. Moving the threshold allowed them to stay ‘in-between’ and, more importantly, not yet old.

An important aspect of this feeling of being ‘in-between’ age groups transpired from the fact that many participants provided care to younger as well as older generations. Some still had teenage children living with them, while others cared for their grandchildren on a regular basis. When it came to caring for older generations, they mostly mentioned caring for their parents as well as incidentally mentioning caring for older friends and older partners, at times hinting towards the societal contribution they made with this care work to other generations and specifically “the real old”. Anneke stated:

“It’s difficult, you know. Because it means that you suddenly have to arrange and do a lot because people can’t do it themselves anymore. And I’m already so busy... I mean, nowadays people having grandchildren as well as old parents and children. (...) In between generations and it’s so busy. Parents, social environment, work (...) And

then the city tells you ‘we can’t arrange this, we can’t help you with that.’ How do you solve that?”

Another ‘in-between’ that came up frequently in the interviews was income sources: while all participants were entitled to a state pension, not all of them received a full state pension due to migration experiences, and not all participants had additional private pensions. Some participants had to live off their savings or partial private pensions because they retired early, while others lived off social security benefits or their partner’s income until reaching the age where they were entitled to a state pension. Some participants remained (partly) employed by choice or financial necessity, while others were still coming to terms with negative experiences of unemployment and social welfare, which influenced their current financial and emotional situation. In brief, for the participants, reaching the retirement age and often also the years preceding that set age were times of financial adjustments and shifts, sometimes multiple, between earning an income mainly from employment and other income sources.

A final ‘in-between’ that was frequently mentioned had a more social connotation and was tied to a spatial expression: participants experienced the just-retiring phase of life as an ‘in-between’ of places and communities; previously spending much of their time in their workplace with colleagues, they now spent more time in their homes and neighbourhoods, with their families and partners – or alone, by themselves. Some of them felt this as a loss of a social circle, and, even when they were still (partly) employed, they felt they did not fit in as well as before. For Aaf, one of the reasons for helping out at her former workplace was that it facilitated contact with younger colleagues, who were an important part of her social circle: “It’s a nice opportunity to have a chat with my colleagues. With some colleagues, I’m really good friends and we have a dinner club, where we each cook in turn.”

Others discovered that once retired and at home far more often, they were not that happy with their home environment and expressed a desire to move to other parts of the country. Jan, when talking about his recent visits to the rural East of the country, where he used to have a mobile home demonstrated this:

“The mentality there is very different from here. And it’s more calm; life here is more hectic... I have a calm chat with the people there – old people are being encouraged there, also by young people... Just having a chat, we don’t have that here. Especially with older people. I observed that and I told my friend, who lived in [village], that things are very different from where we live and he said yes, it’s a whole different mentality. I simply noticed it.”

But wanting to move or travel after retirement is not always a matter of feeling out of place during retirement. Miep for instance, wanted to live somewhere more quiet and green, and contemplated a mobile home. Even though she enjoys the possibility of camping in the quieter months outside the main tourist season, she “absolutely does not want to belong to that group” of older people “all grey heads in the cars with caravans behind them”. Miep uses the phrase ‘grey heads’ repeatedly when talking about older people, especially the ones she encounters when camping: “I don’t mind greeting them, having a chat sometimes. Just activities that are organised for older people, I actually dislike that a lot” She now goes camping with a tent to avoid association with the older campers in caravans and mobile homes, who depict a stereotype of older people’s lives for her that she does not want to associate herself with.

These descriptions show that the interviewees experienced various ways of being ‘in-between’, between age groups, between income sources, between generations, and between places. While talking about this, many participants referred to still being productive, still being mentally and physically capable, yet also not fully considered and approached as a productive member of society anymore.

Hinting towards incapability

The ambivalent feelings of being ‘in-between’ were mirrored in the ways older adults in this study experienced communication, whether in public outlets or in private interactions, and the perceived intentions behind and underlying assumptions in such communications. When asked about experiences with how they would like to be addressed and related preferences in communication, being (implicitly) referred to or treated as an older person walked a thin line between accommodating and overaccommodating: whilst participants appreciated a show of respect for older people's life experience and contributions, overaccommodating communication and interactions were interpreted as belittling and a form of negative stereotyping. Hof described how he sometimes felt belittled in communication from government institutions and companies, for instance, when online processes were explained in detailed steps: “Well, you belong to that group [older people], and then you're approached as if you're not digitally literate.” Anna explained how she does not want to be addressed: “Like you're a child. Presumptuous, like, we will decide what's good for you. I rather wouldn't have that, that seems really unpleasant to me. I want to stay in charge of myself and not be treated like I'm not in my right mind.”

Belittlement and not taking older people seriously, hinting towards underlying assumptions of incompetence, were repeatedly described as an example of ageism. In this context, Piet mentioned how his group of friends, consisting of retired former colleagues, met every Wednesday afternoon in a café for six years in a row until they discovered that they were described as the “*opaatjes*” (‘granddads’) on their bar bill. The establishment reacted badly to their complaint about this, with, as Piet called it, “very condescending language”, so they relocated their meetings to another café from then on. Grietje considers addressing older people as “we” as belittling since there is no individual action or decision making assumed. For example, when older people are asked: “What are ‘we’ going to do?” She wants to be addressed “just as an adult person... Because you're not suddenly a different person just because you happen not to have to work anymore, isn't it?” Several participants explicitly expressed their fear of encountering a belittling tone at a time when they would be dependent on others for care. Lukas stated: “You see that sometimes in nursing homes, they address older women with grandma. Like they're not in their right mind anymore, like they're suffering from dementia... Childish, like they do with babies [imitating a high-pitched voice].”

Strikingly, most participants found it difficult to talk about their communication preferences – except for mentioning that they appreciated respectful approaches – and much easier to explain what they disliked. Particularly prominent were descriptions of overaccommodating communication that hinted towards an assumed incapability they would have. Perhaps this lines up with their ‘in-betweenness’ and rejection of belonging to the older age group, since if they would have a clear preference on how to be addressed as an old person, this would entail a certain experience with and, by extension, admitting to a belonging to this undesirable group.

Ageist communication among the interviewees

Ageist terms in the interviews were mostly reserved for older generations but also used in relation to the ageing process of the participants themselves. Charlotte described, serious at first but laughing somewhat sarcastically about the anecdote after she told it, that while riding an escalator she only recognized her own reflection in the mirror upon second glance, thinking: “That lady wears the same coat. Oh no, look, it's me, that old bag [*ouwe taart*].” The self-designation with this derogatory term shows the association that older interviewees held between being old, physical decline and unattractiveness. Not necessarily experienced by themselves, but mainly how they viewed the ageing process. Extending this to physical capabilities, Miep described that people are old to her “if people are just raggedy and rusty. If they can't easily get on

their bikes anymore and walk with difficulty. So, physically. And, of course, mentally. If there is mental decline, then you're old as well.” Such descriptions and derogatory terminology suggested not only (self) ageist, but also ableist perceptions of the ageing process. In this context, older interviewees disliked the Dutch term ‘*bejaard*’, an ageist term comparable to the English word ‘elderly’, because they felt it did not apply to them, but rather to those dependent on others. For one participant “age does not say enough about what elderly [*bejaard*] is” Instead, he proposed: “When I'm declining and my body is giving in and I have to start using a wheelchair, then I'm elderly [*bejaard*] indeed”. Marja claimed to dislike the term in the media and other types of communication, but mostly because she felt she did not yet belong to that group:

“Like sometimes, in the newspaper they talk about older people as a separate group, they call it elderly [*bejaarden*]. I don't feel elderly [*bejaard*], maybe when I'm 80 or 90. That image is sometimes confirmed though, the image of elderly [*bejaarden*] as ancient and disabled, in an institution or something like that.”

Interestingly, when referring to her own grandmother and disregarding chronological age, Marja applied the term elderly [*bejaard*] herself:

“My grandmother was elderly [*bejaard*]. She went to the nursing home [*bejaardentehuis*] at 65, because back then... the elderly [*bejaarden*] of 65 all had to go to the nursing home, the opposite of what happens now. It was good for them, they had someone to talk to and they received what they needed, also medical care... Very different from the current situation.”

These quotes illustrate that, obviously comfortable using this ageist term, interviewees showed, both consciously and unconsciously, ageist behaviour while simultaneously distancing themselves from the generations above them. Lukas, who described himself as vital and said that in his head he still felt like 30, assumed that society mostly has the perception of complaining, care-receiving people when they see or read about older people: “Real elderly [*bejaarden*]... Yes, that's my term for people that stopped to... that only visit the bingo games and then complain that their children never visit. Complaining, sad older people.” Yet, he cannot imagine that people who personally know him would have such an image of him as an older person, perhaps trying to avoid stigma in positioning himself differently.

Experiences and perceptions of undignified ageing

Perceptions of being old were often informed by experiences with illness and care for ageing parents. Nienke's mother died at home and her children cared for her:

“Who can say if I will also have that care? I don't know. I don't want to think about it too much, that doesn't make sense yet. But it crosses my mind regularly... Because I'm still relatively young it's not an actual matter. But it's a phase waiting to happen and many other people that have those fears arrange something, like a euthanasia pill at home. I can't imagine doing that at all – but well if you're fearing suffering or loneliness, yeah.”

JH described finding it difficult to communicate with his mother, who became impaired as a result of a brain haemorrhage. He had to use a “very low gear”, as he called it, in communicating with her, and felt he lacked the patience to do so. His current fear was to become dependent and impaired like that himself at an older age: “a burden for those around me.” Bella's mother suffered from aphasia, and she noticed that not all staff in the nursing home could handle that or had the patience to communicate with her mother. She also had bad experiences with home care as being stressed and impersonal, recalling how she had seen people “at the mercy of” professional care. She hoped and wished she would be treated like an “equal human being” when she gets older.

Interviewees indicated that their fear of dependency and being old was related to their anxiety about not being treated and approached as a full, capable, and competent person. Their anxiety about being treated in ageist ways clearly interacted with an anxiety about ableist treatment. For some, the intent appeared to be more of a concern than the treatment itself. Mien, a doctor who had worked in a psychiatric hospital, talked about what she considered the unwanted 'overly friendly' way older people are often addressed in hospitals and nursing homes: "I think if someone was too overly friendly to me, but it is obviously well-intended, I could handle that."

Triggering experiences of disregard

The frames through which our interviewees interpreted the municipality letter inviting them for volunteer work were shaped by their perceptions of (assumed) ageism, their own displays of ageist behaviour and their fear of dependency, often relating to experiences of caring for their parents. This became evident when even before the interviews took place; the phone calls and emails of people inquiring about research participation showed that, while many prospective participants considered the letter to be uncontroversial, to certain prospective participants, the topic of volunteering was very controversial. Both in phone calls and in interviews, people shared their experiences of being disrespected and unwanted as older employees, experiences of volunteers replacing paid staff, and how now being asked in a letter to be "useful" as volunteers disregarded their efforts to be useful in the past. Far more than a matter of semantics, this led some to relive experiences in which they were not considered for paid labour.

On top of this, negative experiences and distrust towards its source – the city administration – were at times severe. This was illustrated by people dropping out of participating in this research as they suspected us to "collaborate" with the city administration. We frequently encountered people describing bad experiences with (local) government institutions and connected this to the opinion that such institutions do not care for older people unless they can be of use to them, for example, as volunteers. This sense of disregard was illustrated by diverse experiences that our participants shared in the interviews. For example, Marja was fired at the age of 63. Unable to find paid work and feeling increasingly frustrated and depressed, she made an agreement with the Netherlands Employment Insurance Agency through which she was freed from the obligation to write job applications in return for working as a volunteer for 20 h a week. She enjoyed the volunteer work, but found it demanding:

"You have to have a certain skill level, but that is the case for most volunteer jobs. They stop short of demanding tertiary education and 20 years of experience, but that is what they really want. Volunteers are used for jobs that are downsized, they have to do the same tasks as a paid worker, but they don't get paid for doing so. I am fundamentally opposed to that: work is work, and they just have to pay for it... When I want a paid job, I can't get one because I'm too old, but I am welcomed with open arms when I want to do that same job as a volunteer."

Yet even for volunteer work, acknowledgement and appreciation of their contribution is deemed scarce sometimes:

"I have friends that volunteered in various long term care facilities in the area. Ultimately, the paid staff got less and less, and the volunteers had to take on more and more tasks that used to be part of the nursing assistants' jobs... Often the management walked past them without even looking at them, never mentioning that they appreciated the work they did... There is absolutely no appreciation, and it should not be that volunteers have to do tasks that were previously paid jobs, which I feel is happening a lot in the care sector." (Charlotte).

Jan, having witnessed similar situations, is one of the people who

immediately threw the letter away after reading it, saying he thought, "[Vulgarity] with your volunteer work!" when he read it. The city's suggestion that he should do volunteer work angered him. "I'm worn out. My back and neck are worn really bad, and, lately, my blood vessels are also narrowed." He has a history of hard manual labour; in his own words, he "totally collapsed" and then worked years in sheltered workshops and social enterprises, experiencing homelessness after a divorce and finally being allocated social housing, where he lives now. Jan sees other hard-working people who are worn out just as he is, wondering why the city wants older people like him and his girlfriend to do volunteer work but does not push the young welfare receivers in his building to work as volunteers. These experiences entirely determine his feelings about the city administration's letter, regardless of how it is written.

Certain participants were annoyed by the perceived assumption in the flyer that all retirees would have spare time at hand and needed volunteering to fill their unproductive and idle days. Interviewees stated that people in their age groups had busy lives and could be involved in paid or unpaid work, had care duties, and plenty of social activities. Also, participants who did not explicitly express their annoyance about this assumption of unproductivity somehow felt this underlying assumption, as they felt compelled to emphasise they led busy lives and, therefore, had no time left for (more) volunteer work or to visit events. Evidently, the letter triggered negative experiences of disregard in the past for some participants, whereas it triggered notions of (assumed) unproductivity for others.

Strikingly, even when explicitly probed, many other participants did not comment on the letter's tone and use of language other than stating it did or did not match their personal preferences for formality or complexity. Participants were then quick to point out how these preferences might be different for other people. Whilst people expressed opinions about the letter, these opinions were related to the topic of volunteering and the perceived intentions of the letter's source, the city administration.

When the interviewees were asked directly how they preferred to be addressed in communication, be it in writing or in personal interactions, they displayed the same reaction as when they were asked about tone and language use: they stressed how personal their preference was and how their preference might be different from other peoples' preferences. The participants pointed out how important, yet difficult, it is to make everyone feel valued and included in communication. Even more so than with the letter, they stressed that the perceived intentions of the source mattered in everyday communication. When communication was perceived as well-intended or from a source they trusted, it was less important than that the way it was communicated was not entirely as they preferred it to be.

Discussion

Based on the responses of the forty-nine recent retirees in our study, interviewees were compelled to consider age group identities and (un)conscious stereotypes when they received the letter from the city administration. They described the ambiguity of being 'in-between'; of not being old but not being young, not being productive but not being idle, providing care for young and older generations, and no longer being in the workspace, but not having found a new place yet. These liminal positions allow them to distance themselves from the undesirable social identity of being old. In this article, we empirically show how liminality is not just an ambiguous space between and within identities, but that our participants take up this liminality as a space of communicative opportunities and freedom to navigate and negotiate social identities.

During a liminal phase, people are 'in between' previous and future identities – not fully separated from a former identity, yet not fully integrated into another. The concept of liminality, in the anthropological sense, was first developed in the early twentieth century by [van Gennep](#)

(1909), and later gained broad attention in the works of Turner (1969). The continuously shifting horizons our participants describe reveal the ambiguous, messy character of a liminal stage typified by processes of restructuring and redefinition. Older interviewees' ability to claim a positive social identity by emphasising productivity (e.g., caring for, volunteering for, or working) allowed them to distinguish themselves from older generations. Their further distancing from the 'old' may be interpreted as in line with discussions of other negative social identities, which show that people try to distance themselves from those negatively valued social identities. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, the temporal character of their productivity was stressed in the language of the interviewed participants: "I still work," "I still participate," "I still provide care," – referring to the dependent and unproductive state of the 'old'. This use of language highlights the fluid liminality of their social identities and the temporality of their current life phase. Other than merely being guided by perceptions of age groups and stages, the participants demonstrated constant processes of negotiation, comparison and (re)definition of being old and older. A very similar liminal position is that of being older but not feeling like an old person at all, thus rendering even implicit suggestions of their actual calendar age in communication – such as in the letter of the city administration in our study – as confrontational and unwanted.

Our interviews show that these distancing efforts are further amplified by the presumed assumption of unproductivity that the interviewees felt lay hidden in the invitation. This highlights how embedded and omnipresent a productivist approach to ageing is in neoliberal societies, both in communication and media (Ishikawa, 2022). For some, earlier experiences of disregard on an institutional level were triggered by the letter, since the local government was the sender. This shows that earlier negative, and by extension, positive, regard for other previously held social identities influence these processes of ageism and self-ageism. Our findings show how life-changing events and changes, such as retirement, are shared yet interpreted and experienced differently from individual to individual (Kaufman, 1993; Luborsky, 1994), which emphasises how liminal phases are always enacted depending on an individual's socio-cultural context and their practices and interactions in it (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2017).

Although the diverse societal backgrounds of our research participants shape their liminality through various lived experiences, or their lived 'in-betweenness' (Ibarra, 2007; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016; Luborsky, 1994; Newman, 1999), we find that, overall, their liminal positioning allowed them to cherish a more positive identity than they attributed to those being old. This finding seems to be in line with social identity theory and with earlier studies on ageism (Bodner, 2009; Kite & Wagner, 2002; Lev et al., 2018) and offers insight in how the negotiating of social identities plays out in liminal phases and spaces.

In contrast to obvious instances where a liminal social position is very fragile, with this study we extend these empirical insights by showing how retirement can be a liminal phase in which being 'in-between' social identities is not so much an uncertain, undesired stage, but rather allows a more positive identification exactly through its uncertainty. The 'in-betweenness' is messy indeed, but also a space of possibilities, of room for negotiation of social positions and identities. It then offers not an unwanted but rather a sought-after uncertainty. For our participants, liminal spaces can be spaces to dwell in rather than to flee, to desire rather than to reject. The fluidity of this liminal stage and the lack of demarcations allow older adults to identify themselves in a positive manner and feel incorporated in ways they wish, while opening up possibilities for distinction from less desirable social identities. At the same time, this desirability of liminal spaces signals an important problematic issue vis a vis ageism: the lack of both societal integration of old age and societal adoption of positive associations with old age.

In our analysis, we show that the ways in which liminal spaces enable our participants to stay in-between further our understanding of how social identity theory works in processes of ageism and self-ageism. As our older interviewees were no longer regarded as young – a desirable

social identity – it allowed them to claim an in-betweenness that is ambiguous, an indeterminate phase that offers more opportunities for positive self-evaluation and identification than the social identity of being old, an identity which is arguably considered undesirable (Hogg, 2000; Lev et al., 2018). Current discussions on the third age or 'fourth ageism' seem to partially fit with these findings, in that this in-betweenness provides our participants with opportunities to distance themselves from the 'real old'. Looking at the mechanisms at play of self-ageism, it may also be an attempt to shift negatively valued associations to an ever later age where the so-called third-agers are 'successful', neoliberal, productive, citizens and fourth agers are the embodiment of negatively valued stereotypes (Higgs & Gilleard, 2021). Such shifting may be counter-productive to reduce ageism and self-ageism, as it neglects the diversity of ageing experiences (Kaufman, 1993) and might function as a mere replacement for arbitrary chronological age boundaries.

In line with earlier studies (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017; Bodner, 2009; Bodner et al., 2015; Lev et al., 2018), in our study we find few instances of outright anxiety for death as a primary process underlying the (self-)ageism we identified. Instead, we found our participants made distinct efforts to distance themselves from dependence, and by extension unproductivity, as associated with being old. This distancing from, and the negatively framed perceptions of, unproductivity and dependency highlights the obvious intersectionality of ageism and ableism increasingly documented in social science literature (Changfoot & Rice, 2020; Gendron et al., 2024; Gibbons, 2016). This intersectionality also shines through in the strong association of old age with physical and mental decline, which was feared not only for its perceived discomfort, but also because of the ageist and ableist treatment that this dependency was perceived to unleash and that, to varying extents, participants reflected in their language and descriptions.

The (self-)ageism in our study supports earlier findings that ageist attitudes are internalised throughout the life course (Kotter-Grühn & Hess, 2012; McConatha et al., 2003). In addition, the letter used in this study, sent by the city administration, triggered some of the retirees to negotiate (assumed) ageism on both the social and institutional levels, while displaying such ageism themselves on the individual level. Even when the letter's use of language and tone was not considered ageist, it still elicited feelings – sometimes particularly strong feelings – of assumed ageism on the institutional level, especially regarding productivist notions of ageing.

In relation to communication, this finding points us to an important limitation of communication as a means to enable more positive and less ageist associations with old age. Since any communication that refers to age or later life might trigger internalised ageism and negative perceptions of social identities, a neutral or positive tone of voice and vocabulary is in itself unlikely to prevent or reduce an ageist understanding of such communication or to enable more positive self-identification. Based on our analysis, we therefore argue that the processes of social identity and internalisation of ageist stereotypes on the societal and institutional level at work might hinder or preclude efforts to reduce experienced ageism through (positive) communication. Even referring to a rather positively valued social identity as 'productive retiree' – such as a volunteering retiree – does not transpire into positive identification among our interviewees. This highlights the complexity of how social identity theory may empirically play out. The phrasing of our interviewees of the adverb "still" as showing their ongoing productiveness matching the young may hint to ways to further refine our theoretical understanding here: to enable positive age identification, positively valued associations should transpire from that age phase rather than reiterating and reinforcing (positively valued) associations that point towards being young.

With regard to self-ageism, the concept of liminality helps us to gain insight into people's ability to relate, whether positively, negatively, or ambivalently, to an identity as an older person and how communication might enable or hinder such processes of self-identification, which is the

main research question we address in our study. In our aim to gain more empirical insights, it is valuable to see how these processes are lived through diverse experiences and expressions of (self-)ageism. It allows us to contextualise and build further upon theoretical and not yet thoroughly researched speculations that only communication explicitly emphasising age diversity and the social value of older people enables positive processes of self-identification as an older person (Berner, 2011; Coupland & Coupland, 1993).

If anything, this study directs our attention to the intertwining of societal, institutional, and individual levels of ageism. It urges us to find and emphasise positive values in being old. It is only then that positive interpretations of communication can be enabled, and processes of positive societal identification can be approached. Such identification can only be achieved if, on societal and institutional levels, efforts are made to include the old in desirable roles and positions that provide an inclusive, valued social identity.

Limitations

Since our study is an in-depth interview study, our findings are based on described experiences with ageist behaviour instead of observation of acted-upon ageist behaviours, with the exception of ageist language and attitudes among our participants during interviews. Though retrospective accounts and self-perception of ageism and self-ageism have limitations in this respect, they also offer unique reflections into processes of ageing and self-ageism.

Disciplinary standards on the age of data are varied. While in the more qualitatively oriented disciplines that the authors are familiar with, such as anthropology or qualitative sociology, this data would commonly be deemed valid, we want to acknowledge that data from 2018 could be considered older in other disciplines, yet we believe the processes of age identification we detailed in this study may perhaps differ in strength – for instance being amplified during the COVID-19 crisis as a result of ageist discourses – but not in the patterns identified in this study.

Conclusion

Ageing and retirement were themes our participants were very much preoccupied with, prompting stories of experiencing various ways of ‘in-betweenness’: the liminal spaces and phases between age groups, income sources, generations, and places. The ambiguity of liminality was reflected in the ways the older adults in this study interpreted communication and the perceived intentions behind it, as well as the ways in which they experienced and related to ageist behaviour and attitudes. Dwelling in liminality – intentionally or not – allowed them to adopt a more positive identity than ‘being old’, which was rejected as undesirable. Liminal phases are usually considered uncertain and ambiguous – but in our study we found that, for those recently-retired, it can be a desired ambiguity full of opportunities.

It appears to be the case that communication with an assumed ageist intent, or communication that stems from a source associated with institutional ageism, triggers processes of negative self-identification, regardless of the actual language and tone. Moreover, the lack of positive values attached to old age in society and the resulting undesirability of being old as a social identity also hinders efforts to reduce experienced ageism through communication, and negates opportunities for positive societal identification with ‘being old.’

Statement of ethical approval

This study was reviewed and declared not subject to the law on research involving human subjects by the Medical Ethical Committee of Leiden University Medical Center (case number P17.257). The protocol was assessed and considered compliant with scientific due diligence.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

B. Schuurman: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **W.P. Achterberg:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **T.A. Abma:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **J. Lindenberg:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author(s) declare none.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

References

- Ayalon, L., Chasteen, A., Diehl, M., Levy, B. R., Neupert, S. D., Rothermund, K., ... Wahl, H. W. (2021). Aging in times of the COVID-19 pandemic: Avoiding ageism and fostering intergenerational solidarity. *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 76(2), E49–E52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/GERONB/GBAA051>
- Ayalon, L., & Tesch-Römer, C. (2017). Taking a closer look at ageism: Self- and other-directed ageist attitudes and discrimination. *European Journal of Ageing*, 14(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-016-0409-9>
- Berner, F. (2011). Altersbilder im Bereich der gesundheitlichen Versorgung älterer Menschen: Erkenntnisse und Empfehlungen aus dem sechsten Altenbericht. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt - Gesundheitsforschung - Gesundheitsschutz*, 54(8), 927–932. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00103-011-1316-z>
- Bodner, E. (2009). On the origins of ageism among older and younger adults. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 21(6), 1003–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104161020999055X>
- Bodner, E., & Cohen-Fridel, S. (2010). Relations between attachment styles, ageism and quality of life in late life. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 22(8), 1353–1361. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610210001249>
- Bodner, E., Shrira, A., Bergman, Y. S., Cohen-Fridel, S., & Grossman, E. S. (2015). The interaction between aging and death anxieties predicts ageism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.05.022>
- Changfoot, N., & Rice, C. (2020). Aging with and into disability: Futurities of new materialisms. In K. Aubrecht, C. Kelly, & C. Rice (Eds.), *The aging-disability nexus* (pp. 163–179). University of British Columbia Press. <https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774863698-012>
- Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1993). Discourses of ageism and anti-ageism. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 7(3), 279–301. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0890-4065\(93\)90016-D](https://doi.org/10.1016/0890-4065(93)90016-D)
- Gendron, T., Camp, A., Amateau, G., Mullen, M., Jacobs, K., Inker, J., & Marrs, S. (2024). The next critical turn for ageism research: The intersections of ageism and ableism. *The Gerontologist*, 64(2), Article gnad062. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnad062>
- Gendron, T. L., Welleford, E. A., Inker, J., & White, J. T. (2016). The language of ageism: Why we need to use words carefully. *Gerontologist*, 56(6), 997–1006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnv066>
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. University of Chicago Press (Original work published 1909).
- Gibbons, H. M. (2016). Compulsory youthfulness: Intersections of ableism and ageism in “successful aging” discourses. *Review of Disability Studies: An international Journal*, 12 (2 & 3).
- Higgs, P., & Gilleard, C. (2015). *Rethinking old age: Theorising the fourth age*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Higgs, P., & Gilleard, C. (2021). Fourth ageism: Real and imaginary old age. *Societies*, 11 (1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11010012>
- Hogg, M. A. (2000). Social identity and social comparison. In J. Suls, & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison. The springer series in social clinical psychology*. Boston, MA: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4237-7_19
- Hurd Clarke, L. (2010). *Facing age: Women growing older in anti-ageing culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ibarra, H. (2007). Identity transitions: Possible selves, liminality and the dynamics of voluntary career change. In *INSEAD Faculty and Research Working Paper* (pp. 1–57). <https://sites.insead.edu/facultyresearch/research/doc.cfm?did=2720>
- Ibarra, H., & Obodaru, O. (2016). Betwixt and between identities: Liminal experience in contemporary careers. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.11.003>
- Ishikawa, M. (2022). Media portrayals of transitions from work to retirement in two ageing societies: The case of ageing baby boomers in Japan and Finland. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 62, Article 101062. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JAGING.2022.101062>
- Kaufman, S. R. (1993). Reflections on “the ageless Self.”. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 17(2), 13–16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44878413>
- Kite, M. E., & Wagner, L. S. (2002). Attitudes toward older adults. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons* (pp. 129–161). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

- Kotter-Grühn, D., & Hess, T. M. (2012). The impact of age stereotypes on self-perceptions of aging across the adult lifespan. *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 67B(5), 563–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbr153>
- Lev, S., Wurm, S., & Ayalon, L. (2018). *Origins of ageism at the individual level* (pp. 51–72). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73820-8_4
- Levy, B. R. (2003). Mind matters: Cognitive and physical effects of aging self-stereotypes. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 58(4), P203–P211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/58.4.P203>
- Levy, B. R., Ryall, A. L., Pilver, C. E., Sheridan, P. L., Wei, J. Y., & Hausdorff, J. M. (2008). Influence of African American elders' age stereotypes on their cardiovascular response to stress. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, 21(1), 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615800701727793>
- Levy, S. R., & Macdonald, J. L. (2016). Progress on understanding ageism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(1), 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12153>
- Luborsky, M. R. (1994). The retirement process: Making the person and cultural meanings malleable. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 8(4), 411–429. <https://doi.org/10.1525/MAQ.1994.8.4.02A00050>
- Martens, A., Goldenberg, J. L., & Greenberg, J. (2005). A terror management perspective on ageism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(2), 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-4560.2005.00403.X>
- McConatha, J. T., Schnell, F., Volkwein, K., Riley, L., & Leach, E. (2003). Attitudes toward aging: A comparative analysis of young adults from the United States and Germany. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 57(3), 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.2190/K8Q8-5549-0Y4K-UGG0>
- Newman, K. S. (1999). *Falling from grace: Downward mobility in the age of affluence*. University of California Press. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520218420/falling-from-grace>.
- Nussbaum, J. F., Pitts, M. J., Huber, F. N., Raup Krieger, J. L., & Ohs, J. E. (2005). Ageism and ageist language across the life span: Intimate relationships and non-intimate interactions. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(2), 287–305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00406.x>
- Otten, S., Geluk, A., & Belderok, J. (2015). 65+ En Dan? *Stichting Denktank 60+ Noord*. <https://www.denktank60plusnoord.nl/index.php/diversen/beeldvorming/178-65-en-dan?>
- Palmore, E. B., Branch, L., & Harris, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Encyclopedia of ageism*. Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Rennes, J. (2019). Unpacking age as a category: Chronological age, life stage, and bodily aging in age-based prejudice. *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 60, 257–284. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfs.602.0257>
- Salvatore, S., & Venuleo, C. (2017). Liminal transitions in a semiotic key: The mutual in-feeding between present and past. *Theory and Psychology*, 27(2), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354317692889>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273–285). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European journal of social psychology*, 9(2), 187–204.
- Turner, V. W. (1995). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Transaction Publishers (Original work published 1969).