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GENDER AND ADVERTISEMENT PICTURES IN

AARP: THE MAGAZINE

Shirley Matile Ogletree, Florine Oyakhire, Celisse A. Morgan Valdovinos, & Emilie Ajani

Texas State University—San Marcos

Address correspondence to: Shirley M. Ogletree, Department of Psychology, Texas State University—San Marcos, San Marcos, TX 78666; e-mail: so01@txstate.edu

ABSTRACT

A double standard of aging, leading to a greater emphasis on youth for women compared to men, has previously been noted. We examined gender portrayals in advertisement pictures in 2006 issues of AARP: The Magazine, predicting that pictures of women, compared to men, would be rated as younger and more attractive. Individuals in pictures that met requirements for inclusion in the study were rated for ethnicity, age, and attractiveness. Women were judged by the raters to be significantly younger and more attractive than men. Also, age and attractiveness were significantly negatively correlated. The double standard of aging may extend even to a publication specifically oriented towards older individuals with the largest magazine circulation in the world.

Key Words: double standard, aging, attractiveness, gender

INTRODUCTION

Thirty-five years ago Susan Sontag (1972) described a double standard of aging based on differential bases for worth in aging men and women; the older man tends to be valued based upon his accomplishments and monetary worth, but traditionally women's value has been related to a youthful appearance and childbearing and rearing. Evolutionary theory provides one possible explanation for the greater emphasis on youthful attractiveness for women than men. Because of women's fertility "time clock," women would be most desirable at younger ages when they are highest in fertility. Men, on the other hand, remain potentially fertile much longer and may be selected by women for financial resources that potentially facilitate offspring survival.

Some support for this perspective has been found. Buss (1989), in a cross-cultural study of over 10,000 young adults, found that men put a higher value on physical attractiveness than did women; women, on the other hand, gave greater importance to men's financial prospects. Based on interviews with 28- to 63-year-old women, Giesen (1989) reported that women were thought to be at their sexual appeal/attractiveness peak at younger ages than were men.

Additional research has supported an aging double standard related to appearance, implying that a youthful appearance is more important in women than men and that, consequently, older-appearing women will be judged more negatively. Deutsch and colleagues (Deutsch, Zalenski, & Clark, 1986) found that senior citizens as well as undergraduates perceived women, compared to men, as diminishing more in attractiveness with age. Halliwell and Ditmar (2003), after interviewing women and men of varying ages (22 to 62), reported that women and men tended to be concerned with different aspects of aging; while women were concerned about the impact on appearance, men were more concerned with the body's ability to function.

Harris (1994) included 269 adults, of which 68% were women, in a study regarding aging attitudes. Participants in her sample were more likely to expect women, compared to men, to use hair coloring, wrinkle cream, have plastic surgery, and to lie about their age. Signs of aging, such as gray/white hair, balding, and facial/neck wrinkles were perceived as less attractive for women than men.

Although evolutionary theory provides one explanation for an aging double standard related to appearance, a gender constructivist approach (Liben & Bigler, 2002; Maracek, Crawford, & Popp, 2004) provides another explanation. From this perspective a person actively constructs their own reality, including expectations, attitudes, and behaviors related to gender, based on biological and environmental factors. Exposure to media is one potential environmental influence affecting constructed reality.

Virtually all women in the U.S. today are exposed to media venues that perpetuate the aging double standard in appearance. From the social cognitive theoretical perspective mass media, through symbolic modeling, has "tremendous reach and psychosocial impact" (Bandura, 2001, p. 271). People's understanding of the world around them is affected by

symbolic media input. Long-term media exposure, as described in cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002), may result in cumulative effects of media representations.

Two of the most influential and pervasive mass communication mediums are movies and television. Examining 829 characters from 100 of the top-grossing movies from the 1940s to the 1980s (20 movies per decade) Bazzini and colleagues (Bazzini, McIntosh, Smith, Cook, & Harris, 1997) reported that older women were particularly underrepresented. Although female, compared to male, characters were underrepresented as both central (64% male, 36% female) and secondary (72% male, 28% female) characters, this underrepresentation was especially pronounced for older women. Among central characters, 38% of male characters were rated as over 35 years of age compared to 8% of the female characters. Comparable figures for secondary characters over 35 were 44% of men portrayed compared to 12% of women portrayed.

Lauzen and Dozier (2005) examined 88 of the top 100 movies of 2002, chosen because these 88 movies were available for rental when the study was conducted. In these films females portraying characters in their 20's and 30's were overrepresented compared to the U.S. population while males portraying characters in their 30's and 40's were overrepresented.

Television may also be biased in the representation and portrayals of older women. Signorielli (2004), considering network broadcasts during prime time from 1993 to 2002, found that women over 50 are underrepresented compared to the 2000 census population distribution, and women 25 to 49 yeas of age were overrepresented. Only men over 65 are underrepresented; representation for men 50 to 64 was comparable to the census data.

Considering characters in prime-time commercials on six major networks, Stern and Mastro (2004) reported that male speaking characters occurred more frequently than female speaking characters, and women's ages were judged to be significantly younger than men's ages. Women more frequently portrayed young adults, but men more often portrayed middle-aged adults.

Print media may also be influential. *AARP: The Magazine* includes the claim, the "World's Largest Circulation Magazine," on its cover. AARP, formerly the American Association of Retired Persons, accepts people who are 50+ as members ("Overview: History," 2008). Since this magazine bills itself as having the largest circulation in the world, potentially having a tremendous impact, and since it is oriented towards issues affecting older adults, we decided to examine the pictures of males and females in advertisements of several issues. The decision was made to focus on advertisement pictures only since pictures in articles were often of celebrities and included multiple pictures depicting various events spanning the lives of the celebrities and their families.

For these reasons we decided to conduct the current research focusing on advertisements in 2006 issues of *AARP: The Magazine*. We predicted the following: 1)

that the females portrayed in the ads would be younger than men, and 2) that the females would also be rated as more attractive.

STUDY 1

Method

 Raters. Three undergraduate students each evaluated one of the first three 2006 issues (January/February, March/April, May/June) of *AARP: The Magazine*. The women were of varying ethnicity, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic.

 Materials. Pictures were only included if the majority of the face (eyes, nose, mouth) was visible, if the distance from the chin to the top of the hair was at least ½ inch, and if the face was clear rather than blurry. Cartoon and computerized images were excluded as were "clay people." Raters compared pictures in the three issues of the magazine to exclude any repeats; if a picture in an ad was repeated, only the initial portrayal was coded. If a picture contained multiple people, each person portrayed was rated separately.

 Procedure. Each picture of a person was rated for sex (male, female, unknown), age (0-10, 11-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80), ethnicity (Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, Asian, other), and attractiveness (below average, average, above average). In addition, the product being advertised was noted.

 Interrater reliability. The July/August 2006 issue was used to develop coding criteria as well as establish reliability. To establish reliability 20 pictures from the July/August issue were rated independently by the three coders. The percentage of agreement among the categories was as follows: sex—98%, age—82%, ethnicity—100%, and attractiveness—90%.

 A second interrater reliability check was performed after the individual ratings of the three magazine issues. Each rater also evaluated 20 ads from one of the other issues so that interrater reliability could again be compared. The alpha for sex was l, for age--.95, for ethnicity--.92, and for attractiveness--.75.

Results

 Of the 122 pictures, 65 were of women, 57 of men. The majority of individuals pictured (92) were judged to be Caucasian with African-Americans included in 22 pictures, Asians in five pictures, Hispanics in two pictures, and "other" chosen for one picture.

 Female pictures, compared to male pictures, were rated as younger, t (129) = 2.02, p < .05. Regarding estimated age of the person portrayed, 38% of the individuals pictured were thought to be between 51 and 60 years of age, and another 29% were perceived as being between 61 and 70. For women, though, 16 of 65 pictures (25%) were estimated as being between 41 and 50 while only 4 of 57 male pictures (7%) were considered in this age range. On the other hand, 22 of 57 men (39%) pictured were rated as being from 61 to 70 compared to 13 out of 65 women (20%).

Regarding gender differences in attractiveness female pictures were also rated as more attractive then male pictures, t (119, equal variances not assumed) = -3.39, $p < .001$. A two-by-two (sex X attractiveness with the "below average" and "average" attractiveness categories combined) contingency table was used to compare male/female pictures on attractiveness, X^2 with continuity correction (1) = 9.95, $p < .01$. Of the female pictures 34 of 65 (52%) were rated as above average in attractiveness while only 13 of 57 (23%) of men were rated as more attractive than average.

Correlations between age and attractiveness were computed for male/female pictures together and separately. For male and female pictures together r (121) = -.38, $p < .001$; for female pictures, r (64) = -.47, $p < .001$; and for male pictures, r (57) = -.18, $p = .19$.

Because this study used only three raters who were not naïve to the hypotheses and included only the three issues from the first half of 2006, a second study was performed using uninformed college student participants to rate the age and attractiveness of advertising pictures from all six issues of the 2006 *AARP* issues.

STUDY 2

Method

 Raters. Students who were naive to the research hypotheses were recruited from a teaching theater, junior-level psychology class as an extra credit option. Participants were primarily upper-middle, middle, and lower-middle class and under 25 years of age; the majority were Caucasian. As described below, the ratings of 90 of these students (ten for each picture grouping) were included in the data analyses.

 Materials. Pictures from advertisements for all six 2006 *AARP: The Magazine* issues were included. Each picture was cut out of the magazine and placed on a blank sheet of paper; we wanted to remove as much of the surrounding context as possible so that judgments would be based on individual picture characteristics. However, even though each person was rated separately, if multiple people were grouped together in one picture, they were not separated.

 As in the first study, pictures were excluded based on face size (less than ½ inch from the chin to top of the hair), if the face was blurry, or if most of the face (eyes, nose, mouth) was not visible. Cartoon, computerized images, and "clay people" were also excluded. Only the first occurrence of a repeated picture was included.

 Procedure. Pictures were grouped into nine sets, ranging from 19 to 25 pictures, so that rater fatigue would not affect estimates. Typically the rating task took no more than fifteen minutes. Different undergraduates rated each set of pictures so that responses from a variety of individuals could be included.

 Participants estimated the ethnicity, age, and attractiveness of each person pictured. To estimate attractiveness, participants were asked to use a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all attractive" (1) to "very attractive" (5). To facilitate computation of average age and

attractiveness, ten participants were selected at random from the students rating each group of pictures, and average age and average attractiveness were calculated for each person pictured. In the few cases where raters did not have 100% agreement regarding ethnicity, the majority rating regarding ethnicity was used.

Results

        A total of 206 pictures of individuals meeting the specified criteria were included; 104 were pictures of men, 102 pictures of women. Regarding ethnicity, individuals in 155 of the 206 pictures (75%) were Caucasian, 35 (17%) were African-American, 9 (4%) were Asian, 6 (3%) were Hispanic, and 1 was "other."

        Pictures of girls/women were judged to be significantly younger than pictures of boys/men, $t(204) = 3.27$, $p < .00l$. The average age for boys/men was judged to be 50.21 compared to the 43.95 mean age for girls/women. Estimated ages ranged from 5.3 to 77.7, with 4% of the pictures of people younger than twenty, 26% of people in their twenties and thirties, 53% of people in their forties and fifties, and 17% in their sixties and seventies; age by sex breakdowns are given in Table 1. Notably 61% of the women were judged to be from 20 to 49 years of age compared to 29% of men in this age range. Considering the fifties and sixties age range, 34% of the women compared to 63% of the men were judged to be in these decades.

Table 1

Ages of Individuals Pictured by Sex

Age	Males	Females	Total
0-20	5	3	8
20-29	4	12	16
30-39	12	25	37
40-49	14	25	39
50-59	45	25	70
60-69	21	10	31
70-79	3	2	5

        Regarding perceived attractiveness, female pictures were rated as more attractive than males, $t(199.07$, equal variances not assumed$) = -5.25$, $p < .001$. On the five-point scale ranging from "not at all attractive" (1) to "very attractive" (5), the male mean was 2.92 compared to the female mean of 3.38.

        Age and attractiveness were negatively correlated for all pictures and for female and male pictures separately. For male and female pictures together, $r(206) = -.49$, $p <$

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.00l; for female pictures, r (102) = -.44, $p < .00l$; and for male pictures, r (104) = -.47, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Support was found for the hypothesized differential depiction of males and females in *AARP* advertising, with women's pictures rated as younger and as more attractive than men's pictures. These results support previous media research (Bazini et al*.,* 1997; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Signorielli, 2004; Stern & Mastro, 2004) indicating that older women, compared to older men, are underrepresented in films and on television.

In our sample the majority of women (61%) were judged to be in their twenties to forties, but the majority of the men (63%) were judged to be in their fifties to sixties. These data are similar to Lauzen and Dozier's (2005) statistics for 2002 top-grossing movies indicating an overrepresentation of females portraying characters in their 20's and 30's while males were overrepresented in characters in their 30's and 40's. Similarly, Signorielli (2004) found that women but not men were underrepresented in the 50-64 age range.

Voices of older women provide additional insight regarding how the sociocultural image of the aging woman, combined with a societal emphasis on youthful attractiveness, impacts the well-being of the older woman. Dillaway (2005) interviewed 61 perimenopausal or menopausal women ranging in age from 38 to 60. These women were concerned about the difficulty menopause presented in upholding a "good' or unchanged appearance as they grew older. Of the interviewees, 23 indicated a concern with being more physically attractive for others. Internalization of media messages regarding aging may have contributed to the concerns of these women.

Perhaps an appearance double standard applies even past the end of life. Pictures were more likely to accompany male obituaries in newspapers than female obituaries, and the discrepancy between rated obituary picture age and actual age at death was greater for women than men (Ogletree, Figueroa, & Pena, 2005).

Media is a powerful conveyer of messages; perhaps the old adage "A picture is worth a thousand words" impacts women in multiple ways on multiple levels. According to Rodeheaver and Stohs (1991), advertisements are a primary motivating force contributing to rejuvenation rituals and to the social construction of the older woman's image. Unfortunately advertisements in *AARP: The Magazine,* the most widely circulated magazine in the world and one that is specifically directed toward an older population, may contribute to the older woman's concern with being "youthfully" attractive in a society that discourages wrinkles and age spots.

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