

THE MESSENGER

From RIVERBEND SENIOR LIVING and WILLOW RIDGE HEALTHCARE



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Does Hollywood Have an Ageism Problem?

Do you love to watch the Academy Awards? Every year, millions of us gather round to find out who will bring home the Oscars.

In 2017, the call was for greater diversity after black filmmakers and actors were largely shut out of the 2016 nominations. This year, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the Academy paid more attention to the issues of women.

This focus on inclusivity in filmmaking is admirable ... and yet, according to a set of studies from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California (USC) and Humana Inc. of Louisville, one group has been overlooked and is subject to continued demeaning stereotypes: older adults. The studies report that senior characters have been “underrepresented, mischaracterized, and demeaned by ageist language.”

In 2016, the researchers took a look at the images of aging in the 100 top-grossing films of 2015, and found that only 11 percent of the characters were older than 60, and that over half of these characters were subject to ageist comments and portrayals.

Then in January 2018, they analyzed the top 100 films of 2016. Had things improved? No, said USC’s Dr. Stacy L. Smith. “There has been virtually no progress in the volume of senior representation in the top-grossing films in the past year. As Hollywood embraces representation of other diverse groups, it’s imperative for aging Americans to be included in the industry’s focus on inclusion.”

The researchers also found that these stereotyped film portrayals bore little resemblance to the lives of real older

adults. For example, they noted, older onscreen characters almost never use modern technologies—whereas 84 percent of real American seniors do. And while real-life seniors value their self-reliance, awareness, honesty, resilience and safety, senior characters on the screen seldom exhibit these characteristics.



“Seniors are rarely seen on screen, and when they are, they are ridiculed,” said Dr. Smith. “When did we become a society that is comfortable with subtle and stigmatizing stereotypes about a group that have long served as the pillars and stalwarts of our communities?”

Moving right along, Academy Awards 2017 even saw ageism erupt during the ceremony.

Through no fault of their own, veteran actors Faye Dunaway, 76, and Warren Beatty, 79, announced the wrong winner, *La La Land*, when *Moonlight* had actually taken the top honor. The final credits were still rolling when Twitter burst forth with ugly ageist tweets shaming the actors, who had in fact been handed the wrong envelope by a PricewaterhouseCoopers employee.

Advocates say it’s time to call out this ageism. And there does seem to be some movement. AARP happily pointed out that this year slightly more than half of the nominated actors are older than 50, as are 22 nominees in other categories. Maybe a squeaky wheel is helping! For example, at the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards in January, actress Nicole Kidman used her acceptance speech to draw attention to the dearth of meaningful roles for older actresses (who have it worse than men—consider the the

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well-known phenomenon of action movie franchises where the lead actor grows older from film to film, while always paired with a new young actress).

Casting more older actors as superheroes would be cool, but that's only the start. More films could also feature storylines that illuminate the rich variety in aging, and mine the excitement, suspense and triumph that comes from taking on the challenges of aging and using accumulated wisdom to meet them. Rather than a diet of tragic or depressing portrayals of seniors, it's time to acknowledge the many joys and benefits of being older.

Is this just a matter of fairness? It's so much more than that. Humana's Dr. Yolangel Hernandez-Suarez says, "Our research shows that staying optimistic is vital to the perceived physical and mental health of seniors, and films may be negatively impacting their health by portraying seniors in demeaning or inaccurate ways."

Having a positive attitude about aging has been proven over and over again to have a powerful protective effect. Dr. Becca Levy of Yale School of Public Health has done a lot of research on this topic, demonstrating that having a negative attitude about growing older raises the risk of a host of negative health conditions. Levy's most recent study, just released in February, found that even people who have a high genetic risk of Alzheimer's disease are 44 percent less likely to develop dementia if they have positive beliefs about aging!

Seniors aren't the only ones who could benefit by less ageist attitudes. Dr. Hernandez-Suarez reminds us that as younger people are exposed to a diet of onscreen caricatures of aging, "their view of life past the age of 60 may begin to feel scary or ominous." And Dr. Levy's research reminds us that when teens at the multiplex are exposed to these "grumpy old man" and "incompetent old woman" stereotypes, they're likely to absorb and internalize the denigrating ageist messages—lowering their own chance of experiencing happy, healthy aging.

So this year, pick your movies carefully. Think about the messages about ageing they convey. Consider the line between genuine humor and pernicious stereotypes. Say something. Start a dialogue. No matter what your age, you're doing it for yourself, and for people of every stage of life.

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Aging & Caregiving in the News

Information, updates and interesting tidbits from across the country and around the world.

- Detergent pods are dangerous for people with dementia.
- Can stress management protect our vision?

Recent Fad Reminds Us Detergent Pods Can Be Dangerous—And Not Just for Kids



The viral internet meme of late 2017 was the so-called "Tide pod challenge," which dared teens to eat one of those colorful single-use detergent packets and post online videos of the foolish feat. In response, the manufacturers of these products launched an ad campaign to warn against this fad, and both Facebook and YouTube removed the videos. But fame-seeking teens aren't the only ones in danger of getting poisoned by these handy laundry packets. Ever since the products were introduced in 2012, parents have been warned to keep them out of the reach of small children, who might mistake the colorful packets for candy. And in 2017, Consumer Reports warned that seniors with dementia, too, could mistake these packets for something edible. Indeed, they noted, as of 2017, more adults with dementia than children had died from consuming these pods. Keep detergent pods out of the reach

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Before Claiming Your Social Security Benefits, Think It Through

Important information from the National Council on Aging



How much will you receive from Social Security when you claim your retirement benefits? If you don't know, you're not alone. According to a recent study, one in five people are guessing how much their Social Security retirement benefit will be each month.

As it turns out, your prediction might be off by quite a bit. According to a financial literacy paper, 30 percent of Americans couldn't even guess the amount of their monthly benefit, even though most of them were less than two years away from being eligible to claim Social Security. Another study found that 82 percent of pre-retirees don't understand how the age at which they claim will permanently affect the amount of money they will collect each month for the rest of their life.

Here are several reasons why you shouldn't guess your Social Security benefit amount:

- **The age you start your benefits has a permanent effect on the amount of money you'll receive each month.** Your estimated benefit amount changes based on the age you claim. Your monthly benefit can be reduced by as much as 30 percent if you claim at the earliest possible age of 62. For example, if you expect to receive a monthly benefit of \$1,000 at age 67, but claim at 62, you will only get \$700 each month for life.
- **It's likely to be your largest source of income for**

the rest of your life. Social Security is particularly important for the growing number of beneficiaries aged 80 and older for whom it accounts for 70 percent or more of their income. Also, with employer-provided pensions shrinking in popularity, your Social Security retirement benefit is likely to be your only source of lifetime income that is adjusted for inflation. Not only do many Americans overestimate their benefit amount, but they also may underestimate expenses in retirement. Many retirees will have increased health costs in their later years, and many carry mortgages and other debts into retirement.

- **Waiting to claim your benefits can help you protect the financial security of your surviving spouse.** A third of married people approaching retirement do not know how much their spouse would receive in benefits, nor do they realize how one's decision to claim will affect the other. Timing is especially important if one spouse consistently earned more than the other. For married couples, the longer you wait to claim your Social Security retirement benefits, the more your spouse could receive in survivor benefits if you die.

Why guess your benefit amount, when you can estimate when the right time is for you to begin claiming them? Here's a Planning for Retirement tool (www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/retirement/before-you-claim) to help you estimate your monthly benefit amount at different ages. You can shift back and forth between the different ages as you navigate your decision to start receiving benefits.

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a respected national leader and trusted partner to help people aged 60+ meet the challenges of aging. Their mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. Through innovative community programs and services, online help, and advocacy, NCOA is partnering with nonprofit organizations, government, and business to improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020.

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of people with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. Always use the childproof packaging. Better yet, say many experts, don't keep these products in a home where a person with dementia lives.

Lowering Your Stress Might Protect Your Eyesight

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of vision loss among older adults. People with AMD gradually lose the ability to read, drive and recognize faces, which naturally can lead to stress, anxiety and depression. Now, a research team from the Ohio State University College of Optometry is trying to determine whether the relationship between stress and AMD goes in both directions. According to the research, "Less is known about the relationship between the stress that AMD patients experience and the severity of their disease—for example, whether stress can cause AMD to worsen or not." Study author Dr. Bradley E. Dougherty noted that stress causes increased inflammation, and said, "Because AMD is an inflammatory disease, we are studying the link between inflammation, stress, and AMD treatment outcomes." Dr. Dougherty and his team hope to learn more about whether stress management techniques, such as mindfulness practices, which have been found to be beneficial in controlling many stress-related illnesses, could also slow the progression of AMD. The study was published in *Optometry and Vision Science*.

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