

Visibility patterns of gendered ageism in the media buzz: a study of the representation of gender and age over three decades

Maria Edström

To cite this article: Maria Edström (2018) Visibility patterns of gendered ageism in the media buzz: a study of the representation of gender and age over three decades, *Feminist Media Studies*, 18:1, 77-93, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2018.1409989](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1409989)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1409989>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 08 Jan 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 15613



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)

Visibility patterns of gendered ageism in the media buzz: a study of the representation of gender and age over three decades

Maria Edström 

Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The mainstream media provides a constant flow of visual images of men and women, whether it is via newscasts, billboards, magazines, or television. In media research, these different media types are usually investigated separately. The aim of this study is to analyse the accumulated gender representation of all images that we passively or actively take part in, here defined as “the media buzz.” To capture the representation of gender and age in the media buzz, this study focuses on images from one day in the most circulated media within Sweden: news, feature stories, fiction, and advertising. The empirical data is drawn from three different decades—1994, 2004, and 2014. Overall, the study indicates there to be a general male/female balance in terms of numbers. However, when turning older, both men and women become almost invisible, even though older men are more visible than older women. Older persons rarely reach the news and they are more likely to be found in advertising and feature material. The work presented here suggests that the structures of visibility and the clusters of gender-age representation in the media foster stereotyping. The media buzz not only contributes to ageism, but is also still distinctly gendered.

KEYWORDS

Images of ageing; media representation; ageism; media buzz; gender

Introduction

From the mainstream media emanates a constant flow of visual images of men and women, whether it is via newscasts, billboards, magazines, or television. In media research, these different media types are usually investigated separately. The aim of this study is to analyse the accumulated age and gender representation of all images that we passively or actively take part in, herein defined as “the media buzz.”

More people are growing older and healthier all over the world and the population aged ≥ 65 is projected to triple by 2050, this being considered one of the largest global societal challenges according to the World Health Organization (WHO 2015). Cultural ideas of ageing are reflected in the media, shaping our understanding of the problems and solutions to this worldwide phenomenon. The media both produces and reproduces ideas of

CONTACT Maria Edström  maria.edstrom@jmg.gu.se

Part of the results have been presented in a paper at the 4th European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG), Uppsala, June 11–14th 2015, with the title “Images Limited. Intersectionality during 20 years in the Swedish media buzz” by Maria Edström and Maria Jacobson.

© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits noncommercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

gender and age, and can contribute to stereotyping and discrimination as well as challenge dominant power structures within society. With modern technology along with social media, any person can be their own publisher/broadcaster, so the mainstream media might not seem so important. However, still, news, television shows, fiction, and advertising continue to be major influences on people's lives and a large bulk of social media consists of sharing stories and images remediating and circulating from the mainstream media (Nic Newman 2011). The constant flow of images from the mainstream media that surround us can be defined as a "media buzz." It is like a visual humming in the background that originates from advertisements, news, fiction, and feature stories. We can actively or passively take part in the media buzz, and it also serves as a point of reference that supplies us with ideas of gender, desires, and prescribed styles of performances, both as individuals and as a member of the collective. The media buzz in that sense is normative and prescriptive. Together, all these images contribute to the creation of a preferred reading of representation (Stuart Hall [1973] 2006).

While earlier representation studies have concentrated on single media types, titles, or genres, this study investigated all visible media output at a certain time and place in order to capture the accumulation of gender in the media buzz. The focus is on how representations of gender and age intersect and formulate structures of visibility. The research questions were:

- (1) What are the visibility patterns of gender and age in major mainstream media?
- (2) How does the intersection of age and gender contribute to visibility and stereotyping?

This work evaluates images from one day across the most circulated media in Sweden: news, feature stories, fiction, and advertising. The material was selected from three different decades, being 1994, 2004, and 2014, in order to reveal continuities and changes within the media buzz over time.

The visibility of gender and age in the case of Sweden is relevant in the context of Sweden being a country ranked highly both in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index and the Global Age Watch Index, indicating that Sweden is a great country to grow old in for both men and women. At the same time, Sweden was the last EU member state to adopt legislation against age discrimination.

This study consists of three sections; a brief literature overview on ageing and gender in the media that connects to the theoretical ideas of epistemic injustice, an empirical part on age and gender representation, and concluding reflections on gendered ageism in the media.

Ageing and gender in the media

Age is a fluid concept, as is ageing. The media, as well as media research on ageing, seem to employ chronological age, just as this article has. However, it is worth noting that the category of people 60+ is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, both because of its size (in Sweden, it accounts for 25% of the population) and based on the cumulative advantages/disadvantages that people experience throughout their life courses. One older person can be privileged, visible, and have a voice in public debate, whereas another may never be seen or heard in the media.

Negative views on ageing and older people are often referred to as ageism. Ageism is shaped by prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against older people. When gerontologist, Robert N. Butler, coined the expression in 1969, he was inspired by Malcolm X and adopted an intersectional approach, noting that class, race, and age all interact such that there is discrimination against older people (Butler 1969). Since then, ageism has emerged as a research field in itself (see, for example, Margaret Morganroth Gullette 2011; Gullette 2017; Stephen Katz 2001; Todd D. Nelson 2002; David Schonfield 1982). Many media scholars have shown that gender plays a large part in older people's visibility (Shyon Baumann and Kim De Laat 2012; C. Lee Harrington et al. 2014; Nancy Signorielli, 2004; Latika Vasil and Hannelore Wass 1993). Most mainstream media seem to signal that ageing and older people, especially women, are not newsworthy, interesting, or desirable. This can be interpreted as symbolic annihilation, a term first used by George Gerbner and Gaye Tuchman to describe the absence of women in the media (Gerbner 1973, 1997; Tuchman 1978). In global news, the presence of older people as news subjects seem to be gendered, and women beyond 65 years of age are more likely representing ordinary persons whereas older men serve as experts or spokespersons more commonly—it would appear "... men's currency as interviewees increases as they grow older" (Sarah Macharia 2015, 42).

Media images of ageing are often connected to problems and declining health, especially in the news media (Charlotte Wien 2003). Even within the realm of geriatric research, older people have been demonstrated to be at risk of being stereotyped (Marianne Falconer and Desmond O'Neill 2007). The recognition of old age as "a fixed and knowable property of the body" is being questioned at present (Josephine Dolan 2015, 86) and its relationship with old cultural scripts is becoming less clear, especially when it comes to fashion (Julia Twigg 2013). In a literature review by Xue Bai on images of ageing in society, it was emphasised that even though media images of ageing populations are mostly negative, there are more recent studies of television advertising that feature positive images, such as "the perfect grandparent," "the adventurous golden ager," or "the productive golden ager" (Miller et al. 2004, as in Bai 2014). More diverse representations of older people are appearing, but even ideas of "successful ageing" and more positive portrayals can be problematic (Katz 2001; Anna Sofia Lundgren and Karin Ljuslinder 2011; Magnus Nilsson and Håkan Jönson 2009; Kristina Wallander 2013). Further, the increased media interest in older people can be attributed to a consumer perspective and the market categorisations that follow (Karin Lövgren 2009). Market interest in older consumers is also reflected in the research of older people by the advertising industry, especially older women (Baumann and de Laat 2012; Teri Del Rosso 2017; Jorg Matthes, Michael Prieler, and Karoline Adam 2016; Angie Williams, Marc Wadleigh, and Virpi Ylennä 2010). Attached to the more positive images of older persons are also ideas of "agelessness" that initially might seem positive, but in the long run, become demanding. With this in mind, there is the perception that ageing should not be visible, especially as pertaining to women (see, for example, Kirstin L. Ellison 2014; Denise Lewis, Katalin Medvedev, and Desiree M. Seponski 2011).

Media as knowledge production and epistemic injustice

The media is both part of symbolic power and an arena for exercising it. It has an agenda-setting function that frames stories in various ways (Steven Lukes 2005; David H. Weaver 2007). Social representation or inclusion is considered important for ensuring democracy, equality,

and human rights, and is a concept also applicable to media representation. The philosopher, Alison Wylie, employed the concept of epistemic injustice through building on the work of Miranda Fricker, to describe how cumulative unintentional differences shape gender discrimination in academia and its knowledge production (Wylie 2011). Similarly, the media can be seen as a place for knowledge production, where cumulative unintentional representations of gender exist that may enhance epistemic injustice within society.

In this study, images of women and men are the starting point to investigate the mediation of the social categories of gender and age. Several feminist scholars have pointed out that people's lives are constructed by multiple intersecting systems of overlapping oppressions (Kimberlé Crenshaw 1989; Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall 2013; Anna Carastathis 2014). Such intersectionality can also be a means to deepen the knowledge of how media representations might contribute to knowledge of what Crenshaw calls "representational intersectionality" (Crenshaw 1993, 1282). Within this context, the categories of men and women may still serve the function of revealing how the media loads these categories with meaning and with their repetition contributes to narrowing or widening the visibility patterns of age and gender representations. The clusters of representations then become components that shape stereotypes.

Stereotypes and gendered ageism

Stereotyping is oversimplification and follows a certain pattern. It can be defined as pictures in our heads that we use to interpret and understand the world (Walter Lippmann [1922] 2010). Stereotypes usually originate from preconceptions regarding population groups. They operate at an individual level as well as at a macro level within a population, corresponding with power asymmetries, culture, and symbolism, creating and upholding senses of difference (Schonfield 1982; John Fiske 1993; Hall 1997). Usually, stereotypes are very stable and endow the user with a kind of security and barrier against fear and having to deal with new facts that might threaten life choices. Stereotypes can be positive or negative and are part of general discrimination patterns in society. They can also be seen as an invitation to a mutual understanding, and could be difficult to reject (Mireille Rosello 1997). The media utilises stereotyping as a tool for storytelling to simplify, describe, and explain the world. Stereotyping in the media often adheres to patterns of power, diminishing those with little power and influence in society, and these patterns are closely linked to discrimination.

Stereotypes as a hindrance for gender equality were addressed already in 1979 via the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and they are considered a key component of ageism (Schonfield 1982). Within the research field of cultural gerontology, the gender stereotypes of older people have been uncovered and debated in various ways, and it has also been questioned what it means for men and women to grow old in a mediated society (see, for example, Harrington et al. 2014; Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin 2015; Gullette 2017). Gendered stereotypes in the media may then amplify gendered ageism. If and when women in older age groups are made invisible by the media buzz, then gendered ageism is reinforced.

The Swedish context: the media landscape and ageing

Sweden as a state party has committed itself to meeting the goals of the CEDAW, such as modifying gender stereotypes; and to the Beijing Platform for Action from 1995 with its two targets related to women and the media—to increase participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new communication technologies and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. The Swedish media landscape is comprised of a large number of subscription newspapers, a large public service broadcasting (radio and television) service, and several commercial television channels. However, the Swedish democratic model (like that of many other states) is built upon the idea that the media is a separate entity in relation to the state, being seen as the third or fourth estate. Therefore, in Sweden, self-regulation has been the main political strategy for dealing with the media industry. The state has been reluctant to take action to increase gender equality in the media because there is a risk that it could be seen as a form of censorship or a way of limiting freedom of expression if the media industry was to become more regulated. However, it is not only in Sweden that there is an unwillingness to apply gender equality politics to the media sector. Since 2010, the EU strategy for gender equality no longer mentions any specific goals for the media (Eva-Maria Svensson and Maria Edström 2014). Compared to other countries, Sweden has a higher share of female news subjects (31% versus the global mean of 24%; see Macharia 2015), but with most media types, from film, journalism, and advertising to the growing gaming industry, there is still a lack of gender equality, both within organisations and in media content (Maria Edström and Ragnhild Mølster 2014).

As mentioned earlier, growing old in Sweden is considered to be good. Life expectancy is high in Sweden—for women, it is 84 years and for men, 80 years. Every fifth person is over 65 years of age and about 500,000 have already passed the 80-year mark. The retirement age is 65 with a possibility of working until 67. Women are almost equally as much as men a part of the labour force even though women work part-time more frequently and are still paid less (Swedish Statistics, SCB 2016). Whereas the Swedish legislation on gender equality goes back to 1980, other discrimination Acts came later. It was not until 2009 that Sweden included age as a ground for discrimination, being the last EU member to acknowledge age discrimination. Since then, a joint Discrimination Ombudsman Office was created to focus on all the specifically defined seven grounds of discrimination in the Discrimination Act (Swedish Code of Statutes SFS 2008, 567) that prohibit discrimination related to a person's sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or age.

Methodology and material

The methodology for this study was developed in 1994 when the initial data collection took place. In order to grasp representation and stereotypes, both quantitative and qualitative content analyses was performed in the interest of determining patterns of representation. The main goal was to investigate how gender intersects with other structures, such as age, class, and ethnicity, to influence the visibility of women and men. Continuing on from the 1994 study and exploring the media buzz in 2004 and 2014, it was expected that it would be possible to uncover continuity and change regarding how representations of gender and

age across genres change or remain the same. The gendered media patterns in the media were then compared with Swedish population statistics in order to analyse the democratic deficits that exist in the visual representation of gender and age.

Level one: the quantitative analysis

The first level of analysis was establishing the general patterns of the media buzz and answering the question of what kind of visibility patterns are present with respect to gender and age in the major mainstream media. This was carried out by investigating images of women and men in major Swedish mainstream media from 1994, 2004, and 2014, identifying the visual representations of people in the most circulated media across all major genres in Sweden from one day in broadcasts and print, news, feature stories, fiction, and advertising. Also included were the most popular feature films in cinema, the most rented films, and billboards (advertising) in the city centre of Gothenburg.

The variety of media was chosen with regards to a fictive nuclear family with two genders—a mother, father, daughter, and son. They had no other function other than to serve as the framework for the selection of media—what kind of images may this family be exposed to during one day? From the preferences of this imagined family, the most popular/circulated media was opted for; the largest newspapers and magazines, the most popular television shows on the five major channels, the most watched films in cinemas, the most rented films in Sweden, and the billboards/public advertising on the streets of the city of Gothenburg. Twenty-seven different types of product categories were included in the 2014 study, compared with 29 in 2004 and 25 in 1994. The slightly increased number of media products was based on new types of media that emerged, such as free daily newspapers with large-scale circulation. More television shows were also included in the later years over time as viewing became more individualised and there were fewer people watching the same programmes.

The selection of media titles was somewhat consistent; nine titles were exactly the same in 1994, 2004, and 2014, whereas others changed. This was the result of the changing media landscape, with more diverse and fragmented audience patterns as well as more specialised media. Fictional television series declined in popularity and new titles appeared while factual television entertainment became more popular, such as one show where people make dinner in each other's houses/apartments. For comparative reasons, social media was not included in the 2014 media buzz material—there was an advantage to keeping the same criteria for the selection of media. The second argument was that a large proportion of the images circulating in social media emanated from the largest mass media titles, and also that the major stories in social media often eventually reach the major mass media outlets (Newman 2011).

Every person in an image was considered a case/unit of analysis. With this, the various mediums had different limitations. For newspapers and magazines, the coded image had to be at least one column wide. For television news and fiction, there needed to be a voice. For commercials, presence in the image was sufficient. The headline, text, voice, and other content information in connection with the image was employed to establish the case profile. Nineteen different variables were utilised for all cases: product, genre, gender/sex, age, looks, class, health, origin, sphere, environment, geography, issue, relationship, role, sexual orientation, position, origin, majority/minority, and sexualisation. By also using string variables

and a comment field in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS; IBM, Chicago, USA) software, it was possible to better track the material for the second level of analysis. The coding was carried out by the same two persons for all three studies with cross-verification of interpretations and bias. Linked to the quantitative component of the study were dilemmas and problems with social categorisation of persons in images. Visual markers of assumed gender/sex were fairly easy to establish using name, physical appearance, social situation, and context. Defining age groups of the persons were also fairly easy since noting the chronological age is a popular part of the media representation of a person, and it is noteworthy that the context may also indicate the age group. For public persons, such as politicians or celebrities, age was controlled, and as long as a person was presented by name, age could be verified on various websites (e.g., Wikipedia and birthday.se).

To compare the gender and age representations of the media buzz to the Swedish population, population statistics from the SCB was made use of.

Level two: the qualitative analysis

The second level of analysis sought to answer the question of how the intersection of gender and age contributes to visibility and stereotyping. The analysis was based on the visibility patterns that became apparent during the first quantitative phase. These clusters of representations of gender-age were then assessed in a qualitative manner with a close reading of the text that considered appearance, pose, facial expression, colour, clothes, topic, and context. Hence, stereotypes were identified on the basis of the quantitative analysis. In this qualitative analysis, a single image might not have been a problem on its own, though it could create and recreate a stereotype in relation to all other images. For example, a story about a female top model may have been an example of the stereotype of women reaching the top because of looks/beauty capital. Similarly, a male business executive could have been yet another example of how men receive media attention because of action and competence. It is the repetitive pattern of certain representations that creates a stereotype.

The intersectional analysis on age and gender was then further evaluated with the support of the other variables, such as the themes and topics that framed the images. The qualitative component also analysed poses, facial expressions, colour, attributes, environment, language contextualisation, and activity.

Results I: gender and age in the media buzz

In the media buzz, it was observed that there was a gender balance over the years accounted for in this study with respect to numbers—both men and women are present within the 40–60 dimension, a common quantitative definition of gender equality. However, the overall share of women seems to be decreasing. In 2014, there was a 46% women visibility compared with 53% in 1994 (see Table 1).

The main result in the 1994 study was that while women and men were equally present in terms of numbers within the media buzz, their behaviours were distinctly different and often stereotyped. Men could have many roles both in the private and public sphere, women resided mostly in the private sphere, were young and engaged with their personal needs. Since then, women and men still populate the media buzz, albeit in different ways. Women are still most likely to be found in feature and advertising which are the two dominant genres.

Table 1. Share of women and men in the Swedish media buzz 1994, 2004, and 2014.

	1994	2004	2014
Women	53	45	46
Men	47	55	54
Total	100	100	100
Number of Cases	1245	1919	1984

Note: The cases consist of images of people from one day across the most circulated mass media in Sweden.

The news, often considered the most important media genre in terms of agenda setting, is male dominated but is a rather small share of the overall Swedish media buzz. In 1994, 8% of the total material consisted of news, while in 2014, it grew to 10%. With this, women have raised their overall visibility in the news, from 6% to 8%. As well, men have increased their presence in advertising since 1994, rising from 26% to 35%, which is a significant change and explains the overall increase in male visibility. Men are more likely than women to be present in news and fiction, whereas women are still more likely to be found in feature stories and advertising, having become more prominent in feature material while slightly reducing their presence in advertising since 1994.

Gendered spheres and topics

The private sphere is the most central and dominant sphere within the media buzz. In 1994, females were primarily placed in a private context; three out of four women appeared in the private sphere. Twenty years later, it seems women became more visible in the public sphere, but the traditional male dominance of the public sphere has persisted, and this is where you would also find the majority of older men. By 2004, women's visibility in the public sphere rose. This could be explained in part because of the new types of titles in the selection of media, such as the women's magazine, *Amelia*. *Amelia* began in 1995 and quickly became the most popular women's magazine in Sweden, a key reason being was that it dealt with work- and career-related issues.

Still in 2014, women are more likely to be featured in topics regarding their private lives and personal needs, and men tend to appear more in the private or public spheres, associated with topics such as politics.

Age in the media buzz

Older persons were almost invisible within the Swedish media buzz in 1994 (Maria Edström and Maria Jacobson 1994), and this was further confirmed by Edström in a study on prime-time television in Sweden (Edström 2006). Subsequent to that era, there has been a slight increase in people aged 60 years and older, from 3% to 5%, from 1994 to 2014, but that does not at all correspond with the demographics of Sweden, where a quarter of the population was 60 years or older in 2014.

The most interesting persons for the media seem to be those that belong to the ages of the potential workforce. People in the age groups between 15 and 44 are most likely to be present in the media. After the age of 45, one's affiliated age group becomes less visible. Children and older people have clearly been historically marginalised in the media buzz, and that has not changed much over time (see Figure 1).

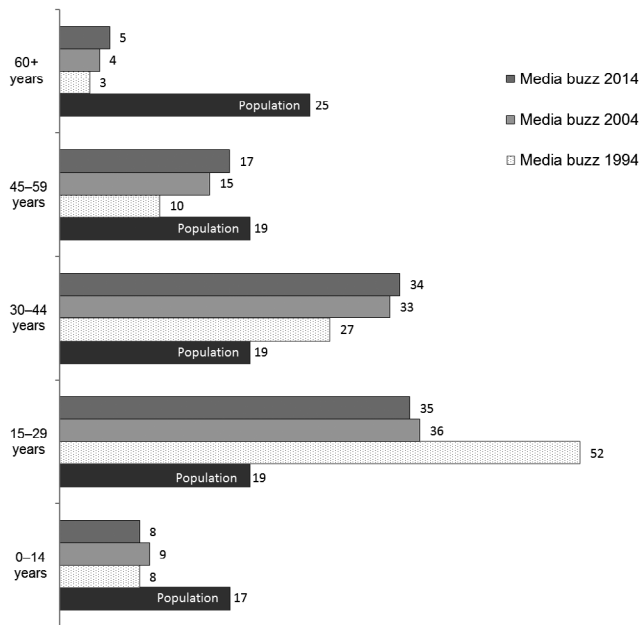


Figure 1. Share of different age groups within the Swedish population and media buzz (per cent).

Note: The share of the population aged 60+ has increased from 22% to 25% since 1994. In the media buzz, it has increased from 3% to 5%. Total number of cases 1994: 1245; 2004: 1919; 2014: 1887. Source for the share of population is the SCB.

Age and gender in the media buzz: 1994 and 2014

The media buzz indicates that age is very gendered in the media. Youth and youthfulness is an important form of capital, especially for women in the media. The younger a woman is, the more likely she is to have a place within the media. That pattern has been apparently consistent over the years. In 1994, 69% of women in the media were between 15 and 29 years of age, mostly present in advertising and concerned with personal needs. After the age of 30, women become more invisible as they grow older (see Figure 2).

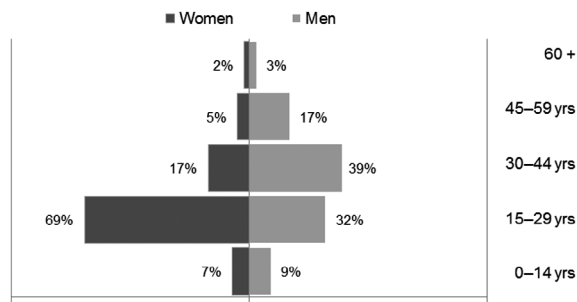


Figure 2. The gender and age ladder of the media buzz in 1994.

Note: Based on the images of people from one day across 25 media products in Sweden in 1994 (N=1245). The total share of women was 53% and the total share of men was 47%.

In contrast, men are visible in more age groups, with their prime time being between the ages 30 and 44. Children and older people were almost equally invisible in 1994, with a slight trend of male dominance.

The gendered age pattern from 1994 remained in place 20 years later, being only slightly altered. The dominance of young women has continued to persist, but more middle-aged women were visible in 2014 (see Figure 3). Interestingly, middle-aged women were already beginning to become more visible in the Swedish media buzz in 2004, and even more so in 2014. A contributing factor was the change in the media market, where new best-selling glossy magazines emerged, *Amelia*, mentioned earlier aiming for 30+ audience and *Tara*, aimed at 40+.

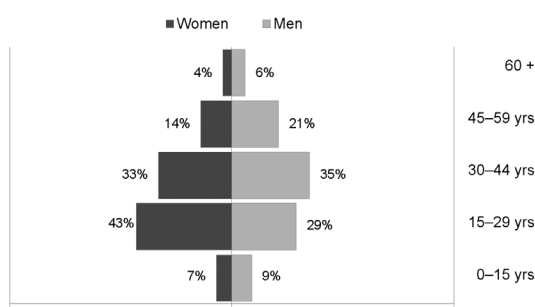


Figure 3. The gender and age ladder of the media buzz 2014.

Note: Based on the images of people from one day across 27 media products in Sweden in 2014 (N=1863). The total share of women was 46% while the total share of men was 54%.

Still, visibility for persons 60 years or older were very unlikely in either 1994, 2004, or 2014. Even though the share of men and women across different age groups within the media buzz changed between the years, there continued to be a consistent pattern whereby women were more likely to be visible the younger they were, whereas men were most prominent during their prime between 30 and 44 years of age. Children and older people continued to be underrepresented compared to their actual proportions of the Swedish population, but even with these age groups, there was a pronouncedly lower proportion of women.

Results II: stereotypes shaped by structures of visibility

This study indicates that structures of visibility regarding age and gender are shaped in the media buzz. Men and women were clustered around certain topics, spheres, and genres. This in turn shapes prejudices that form gendered stereotypes. These stereotypes are not actual persons with individual identities; they are more of an attempt to fixate dynamic intersections into temporary moments of stability for the sake of stereotype analysis. They symbolise preferred bodies, looks, shapes, expressions, attitudes, lifestyles, and so on that interplay with dominant societal norms of gender, social class, functionality, sexuality, age, and other axes of discrimination.

Stereotypes were present in various forms in 1994, 2004, and 2014, but were also updated and developed. This article will limit itself to providing a short description of four of the stereotypes.¹

The fashion slave

Fashion and clothes are the largest topic in the media buzz, both in advertising and hybrid ad-editorial content. In 1994 and 2004, this was strongly dominated by young women, while in 2014, it had become increasingly populated by men. Signs of femininity and masculinity have been two separate units enhanced with multiple gender codes in the media to emphasise the dominant binary system of two genders, or the two-gender norm. Two examples include:

- (1) A slender woman is standing, posing with her feet pointing inwards, a rather common pose linked to media femininity, which can be associated with childishness or playfulness. In a pink and black dress, the headline read: "The pink thread." The introductory line to the left of the image stated: "We celebrate all wonderful femininity with the pink accessories of autumn"; and
- (2) A young man is getting out of a car in an urban landscape, visibly on the move, dressed in a black suit. The headline read: "Good work." The smaller headline stated: "Powerlook."

"The fashion slave" stereotype is most often of young women that are 20 to 35 years old, slim, Caucasian, and frequently placed in a studio environment, whereas the male version is associated with some sort of professional life. In both cases, youth is the desired mode. Fashion, gender, and age might be in transition as other researchers have indicated (see, for example, Lövgren 2009; Twigg 2013), but in the Swedish media buzz of 2014, people over 60 were seemingly not permitted into the area of fashion regardless of gender.

The beauty slave

Along with fashion and clothes, beauty and fitness are important topics of the media buzz, and 24% of all persons were part of this main topic. Within the subtopic of "beauty," 90% of cases were women and none were over 60 years of age. Beauty work is presented in the media as one way to be transformed into a powerful and independent woman. When explicit language is used in young women's magazines and advertisements, the key words are occasionally taken from liberating, emancipatory rhetoric, such as "daring," "bold," "freedom," "rights," and "free choice." "The beauty slave" stereotype is composed of specific values, where youth is essential. There is a large amount of advice on how to look youthful found in the media—cosmetics, creams, and surgery are all big business. Here, the global branding of products seems to contribute to preserving the ideal of youthfulness and agelessness.

The executive

"The executive" as a stereotype did not change much over the years in focus. Usually, this type of masculinity is framed by power in one way or another, like, for instance, political or corporate power. Gender codes are typically darker colours, often grey or conservative blue. Gestures are controlled and facial expressions serious or vaguely optimistic. This is an elite type of power look which is very uniform in style. These sorts of images are global images of masculinity, power, and control and they fit well into the concept of transnational business masculinity, a form of hegemonic masculinity (Raewyn Connell 1995; Raewyn Connell and

Julian Wood 2005). Ageing seems to actually bolster this particular masculine stereotype and older men appear comfortable in this role. Within the Swedish media buzz, “the executive” arises as politicians, professors, authors, or former athletes. Their elite status increases the visibility of both men and women. Interestingly, there does appear to be an emerging feminine “executive” stereotype, and although these images are rare, they tend to be younger. The exception is Angela Merkel (born 1954), the German Chancellor who reigns in the news together with the Swedish Queen Silvia (born 1943).

The love goddess/love god

Sex and relationships are also huge topics within the media buzz. There has definitely been an overall increase in sexualised content within the media buzz even though the most sexist media products have seen diminished circulation or disappeared. Sexualisation in this context refers to content that is not necessarily about sexuality, though is framed sexually. Sexualised content could be, for example, eating, showering, or just posing. In the 2014 study, blunt sexualisation had been downplayed in traditional media. The most popular sex-related magazines that existed in 1994 and 2004 were no longer in print in 2014 and it was no longer easy to find the clear-cut Madonna-whore dichotomy as was the case in 1994. This could be an indication that this dichotomy is in decline or that it has moved from traditional media and migrated to the internet.

Over the past 20 years, male beauty has become a standard or norm for defining heterosexual masculinity in the media context, similar to beauty being a norm in the construction of femininity. It is not easy to decide whether the gaze through which “the love god” is created is supposed to be feminine, masculine, or unisexual—it seems to be pending. Nudity in this male image can be classified as *heroic* (active subject), the opposite of *posing* (passive object) nudity that women are more likely to be engaged in within the media buzz. However, most importantly, it is more often than not a young male and/or female body on display. The lack of interest in the media buzz regarding older people when it comes sex and relationships is noteworthy as Swedish geriatric research has determined that older people are having better sex lives and relationships than ever before (Nils Beckman, Margda Waern, Svante Östling, Valter Sundh, and Ingmar Skoog 2014).

Observations: an emerging woman in charge, status, and exclusion

In the 2014 study, there were a number of images of older and capable women, both in advertising and feature stories. This might be the origin of the formation of a positive stereotype of ageing. For instance, there are older women who advise others how to arrange an early pension, talking about their creative careers, how they became millionaires in lottery games, and how they resolved their health problems. They are in the private sphere but act as agents of their own lives, not necessarily successful, but in charge. The same for men was not seen.

Even though the clusters of representations of gender and age that shape the stereotypes in this study cannot all be placed within traditional elite categories, it is hard to associate them with poverty, shift work, or debt restructuring. A number of them could be labelled classless but most could be placed within a middle-class category. All are well-groomed with skin that is well taken care of. They have able bodies along with a body style and shape that

conforms to societal norms. They also have an air of success. These representations produce and reproduce ideas and norms of ageing and gender as well as preferred lifestyles, both at a local and global level.

Most types of human bodies are not seen in the media at all and are certainly not becoming stereotypes. The excluded bodies are functional variations, trans- and intersex bodies, as well as larger-sized and ageing bodies. These kinds have also been symbolically annihilated or strongly underrepresented within the media buzz as there has been no particular signs of any unsteady gender constructions, like that of queer or transgendered individual. Unsurprisingly, gender stereotypes appeared to be pretty stable within the Swedish media buzz.

Conclusions and reflections

All images within the media buzz are important and together they form aggregated visual patterns of gender and age that appear to have been quite persistent over time. The work presented here has suggested that structures of visibility in the media buzz not only contribute to ageism, but are also still distinctly gendered.

There is a male/female balance in terms of numbers within the media buzz, but genres, topics, or spheres are gendered. Men have continued to be more likely found in the public sphere even though women over time have increased their presence therein. Youth is an overarching theme of the media buzz, while children and older people continue to be underrepresented, women more so than men. Considering that people over 60 years account for 25% of the Swedish population, it is stunning that there is such a lack of representation of and storytelling with people from the later stages of life. A relevant factor explaining this is probably that legislation against age discrimination arrived so late in Sweden. Yet, this still does not account for the dominant focus on people in the potential workforce, especially when one considers that most people in the media buzz primarily are found within the private sphere. However, compared to 20 years ago, there has been a modest rise in the share of older persons in the media buzz, from 3% to 5%, but men are more likely to be visible as 60-plus-year-old persons. New media titles/products aimed at older women have contributed to that increase, but if an older person appears, it is still more likely to be a man.

The lack of voice and visibility of the growing numbers of older people can be interpreted as a clear democratic deficit—it limits both the public debate and our level of knowledge surrounding ageing. It also affects older people themselves, as their lived experiences are rarely shared and opinions seldom heard. It can also be regarded as a mode of stereotyping because it signals that the annihilated do not matter or are very lowly valued. Older persons may be considered by the media to be invisible, but they clearly exist, not the least in Sweden with its large population of 60-plus- and 80-plus-year-old individuals. It would seem that media buzz is primarily interested in including healthy older persons from the early years of retirement. Older women and frail older persons who are not resourceful consumers are thus silenced, though not by intention but through a form of unintentional neglect by the media. This is not the result of a single news article, advertisement, or television production, but is rather an example of cumulative unintentional discrimination parallel to the concept of epistemic injustice of Wylie (2011). Wylie was discussing science and the scientific community, but the concept could be extended to the media and the representations of people that form a media-content population. In this scenario, the media would be seen as an entity

in the same way science is. There are indeed likenesses between the media and science as entities. Both produce knowledge, both are regarded as power institutions, and both are crucial components of a democratic society. Scholars, when theorising about groups being rendered invisible, underrepresented, and misrepresented often refer to Gaye Tuchman's (1978) use of the term symbolic annihilation. It is debatable whether epistemic injustice occurs as a result of symbolic annihilation or if symbolic annihilation could be described as a kind of epistemic injustice per se.

The mass media represents a type of knowledge as well as value production, which often conforms to dominant cultural norms and promotes particular categories of people, voices, views, and bodies. Youthful and elite persons are categories that are enhanced within the media buzz, as is heteronormativity. This might not be purposeful discrimination, but, instead, this discrimination can be seen as a consequence of remnants from historical ideas of "otherness." Gender and age, along with other social categories—or intersections—are temporarily stabilised into stereotypes in the media. Every image features multiple intersections and an intersectional approach to media analysis can highlight systems of privilege and oppression. Studying the media buzz makes it possible to uncover the larger picture of how representation and visual patterns contribute to confirming, enforcing, or challenging power asymmetries of gender and age in the media.

Finally, a more political reflection: We all want to age well, but there are cumulative advantages/disadvantages to ageing that need to be addressed in the media. As many scholars have noted, the media tends to be consumer-oriented, not citizen-oriented, especially when it comes to women. This is noted to be true for the Swedish media buzz, though it could potentially be a place for renegotiation of identities while also serving as a place for fixating old stereotypes in new settings. In the work presented here, certain patterns of gender representation seem to have changed over time, even if it has been a slow process. An example of that is the increased visibility of middle-aged women, whereas other groups continue to be marginalised, such as older persons, especially older women. Overall, gendered ageism appears to be nourished by the media buzz.

Note

1. Six stereotypes were extracted from the media buzz in 1994: "the fashion slave," "the beauty slave," "the love god/goddess," "the hero," "the household functionaire," and "prince charming."

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This research has been partially financed by AgeCap, Centre for Ageing and Health, University of Gothenburg. The data collection was made possible through grants from the Swedish funds Wahlgrenska stiftelsen (2004), Publicistklubben (2004), and Journalistfonden (2004 and 2014).

Notes on contributor

Maria Edström is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMG), University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her fields of interest are gender, human rights, and freedom of expression. She is part of the transdisciplinary Centre for Ageing and Health (AgeCap) as well as the research project, Comparing Gender and Media Equality Across the Globe. Email: maria.edstrom@jmg.gu.se

ORCID

Maria Edström  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4129-5859>

References

- Bai, Xue. 2014. "Images of Ageing in Society: A Literature Review." *Journal of Population Ageing* 7 (3): 231–253. doi:[10.1007/s12062-014-9103-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12062-014-9103-x).
- Baumann, Shyon, and Kim de Laat. 2012. "Socially Defunct: A Comparative Analysis of the Underrepresentation of Older Women in Advertising." *Poetics* 40 (6): 514–541.
- Beckman, Nils, Margda Waern, Svante Östling, Valter Sundh, and Ingmar Skoog. 2014. "Determinants of Sexual Activity in Four Birth Cohorts of Swedish 70-year-olds Examined 1971–2001." *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 11: 401–410. doi:[10.1111/jsm.12381](https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12381).
- Butler, Robert N. 1969. "Age-Is: Another Form of Bigotry." *The Gerontologist* 9 4: 243–246.
- Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. 2013. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs* 38 (4): 785–810. doi:[10.1086/669608](https://doi.org/10.1086/669608).
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989: 139–167.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1993. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241–1299.
- Carastathis, Anna. 2014. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philosophy Compass* 9 (5): 304–314. doi:[10.1111/phc3.12129](https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12129).
- Connell, Raewyn. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Connell, Raewyn, and Julian Wood. 2005. "Globalization and Business Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities* 7 (4): 347–364.
- Del Rosso, Teri. 2017. "There's A Cream for That: A Textual Analysis of Beauty and Body-Related Advertisements Aimed at Middle-Aged Women." *Journal of Women & Aging* 29 (2): 185–197. doi:[10.1080/08952841.2015.1125698](https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2015.1125698).
- Dolan, Josephine. 2015. "Crumbling Rejuvenation: Archetype, Embodiment and the 'Aging Beauty Myth.'" In *The Happiness Illusion: How the Media Sold Us a Fairytale*, edited by Luke Hockley and Nadi Fadina, 75–88. London: Routledge.
- Edström, Maria, and Maria Jacobson. 1994. *Massmediernas enfaldiga typer: Kvinnor och män i mediebruset* [Images Limited. Women and Men in the Media Buzz]. Working paper 38, JMG, University of Gothenburg.
- Edström, Maria. 2006. *Tv-rummets eliter: Föreställningar om kön och makt i fakta och fiktion* [The Television Elites. Images of Gender and Power in Fact and Fiction]. PhD Diss., University of Gothenburg.
- Edström, Maria, and Ragnhild Mølster, eds. 2014. *Making Change. Nordic Examples of Working Towards Gender Equality in the Media*. Göteborg: Nordicom. Accessed November 21, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/37362>
- Ellison, Kirsten L. 2014. "Age Transcended: A Semiotic and Rhetorical Analysis of the Discourse of Agelessness in North American Anti-Aging Skin Care Advertisements." *Journal of Aging Studies* 29: 20–31.
- Falconer, Marianne, and Desmond O'Neill. 2007. "Out with 'The Old', Elderly, and Aged." *British Medical Journal* 334 (7588): 316. doi:[10.1136/bmj.39111.694884.94](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39111.694884.94).

- Fiske, Susan T. 1993. "Controlling Other People: The Impact of Power on Stereotyping." *American Psychologist* 48 (6): 621–628. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.48.6.621.
- Gerbner, George. 1973. "Cultural Indicators: The Third Voice." In *Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New 'Cultural Revolution'*, edited by George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, and William H. Melody, 555–573. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gerbner, George. 1997. "Gender and Age in Prime-Time Television." In *Perspectives on Psychology and the Media*, edited by Sam Kirschner and Diana Adile Kirschner, 69–94. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. 2011. *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America*. Chicago, [Ill.]; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. 2017. *Ending Ageism, or How Not to Shoot Old People*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Hall, Stuart. (1973) 2006. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 163–173. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hall, Stuart. 1997. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'." In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, 223–279. London: Sage in association with the Open University.
- Harrington, C. Lee, Denise D. Bielby, and Anthony R. Bardo. 2014. *Aging, Media, and Culture*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Lewis, Denise, Katalin Medveder, and Desiree M. Seponski. 2011. "Awakening to the Desires of Older Women: Deconstructing Ageism within Fashion Magazines." *Journal of Aging Studies* 25 (2): 101–109.
- Lippmann, Walter. (1922) 2010. *Public Opinion*. LaVergne: Greenbook Publications.
- Lukes, Steven. 2005. *Power: A Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lundgren, Anna Sofia, and Karin Ljuslinder. 2011. "Problematic Demography: Representations of Population Ageing in the Swedish Daily Press." *Population Ageing* 4: 165–183.
- Lövgren, Karin. 2009. "Fyrtiotalist, 50-plussare, mappie. Om ålderskategoriseringar i reklam och populärpress" [Forty Something, 50 Plus or Mappie. About Age Categorisation in Advertising and Popular Press]. In *Åldrande, åldersordning, ålderism*, edited by Håkan Jönson, 121–137. Linköping: Linköpings universitet.
- Macharia, Sarah. 2015. *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2015*. Toronto: World Association for Christian Communication. Accessed November 21, 2017. www.whomakesthenews.org
- Matthes, Jorg, Michael Prieler, and Karoline Adam. 2016. "Gender-Role Portrayals in Television Advertising Across the Globe." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 75 (7–8): 314–327.
- Nelson, Todd D., ed. 2002. *Ageism: Stereotyping and Prejudice Against Older Persons*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Newman, Nic. 2011. *Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Discovery*. Oxford: University of Oxford, Reuter Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Nilsson, Magnus, and Håkan Jönson. 2009. "Äldre i massmedierna – osynliga eller förknippade med problem" [Elderly in the Media - Invisible or with Problems] In *Åldrande, åldersordning, ålderism*, edited by Håkan Jönson. Linköping: Linköpings Universitet.
- Katz, Stephen. 2001. "Growing Older without Aging? Positive Aging, Anti-ageism, and Anti-aging." *Generations (San Francisco, California)* 25 (4): 27–32.
- Rosello, Mireille. 1997. *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures*. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.
- Schonfield, David. 1982. "Who is Stereotyping Whom and Why?" *Gerontologist* 22 (3): 267–272. doi:10.1093/geront/22.3.267.
- Signorielli, Nancy. 2004. "Aging on Television: Messages Relating to Gender, Race, and Occupation in Prime Time." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 48 (2): 279–301. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4802_7.
- Svensson, Eva-Maria, and Maria Edström. 2014. "Freedom of Expression vs. Gender Equality -Conflicting Values When Regulating Gender Stereotypes in Advertising." *Tidsskrift for Rettsvitenskap* 5: 479–511.
- Tuchman, Gaye. 1978. "Introduction. The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media." In *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, edited by Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet, 3–38. New York: Oxford U.P.

- Twigg, Julia. 2013. *Fashion and Age: Dress, the Body and Later Life*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Twigg, Julia, and Wendy Martin. 2015. *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.
- Vasil, Latika, and Hannelore Wass. 1993. "Portrayal of the Elderly in The Media: A Literature Review and Implications for Educational Gerontologists." *Educational Gerontology* 19 (1): 71–85. doi:10.1080/0360127930190107.
- Wallander, Kristina. 2013. "Successful Images of Successful Ageing? Representations of Vigorous Elderly People in a Swedish Educational Television Programme." *Nordicom Review: Nordic Research on Media and Communication* 34 (1): 91–103.
- Wien, Charlotte. 2003. *Aeldrebilledet i medierna gennem 50 år* [Images of Older People in the Media throughout 50 Years]. PhD Diss., University of Southern Denmark. Syddansk universitetsforlag.
- Weaver, David H. 2007. "Thoughts on Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming." *Journal of Communication* 57 (1): 142–147. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00333.x.
- Williams, Angie, Paul Mark Wadleigh, and Virpi Ylännä. 2010. "Images of Older People in UK Magazine Advertising: Toward a Typology." *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 71 (2): 83–114.
- Wylie, Alison. 2011. "What Knowers Know Well: Women, Work and the Academy." In *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, edited by Heidi E. Grasswick, 157–179. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-6835-5_8.

Official Documents/Legal Acts

- Discrimination Act* (Swedish Code of Statutes 2008:567).
- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979.
- UN World Conference on Women 1995: *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action* (Dept. of Public Information, United Nations, New York, 1996). Accessed May 10, 2014. <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>>.

Websites

- Swedish Statistics (SCB), data Accessed October 10–15, 2016, www.scb.se
- WHO 2015: Fact sheet no 404 Ageing and health. Accessed September 11, 2017. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs404/en/>
- World Economic Forum 2016: Gender Gap Index 2016. Accessed June 16, 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2016>