nonhousehold, institutional populations such as nursing homes; design more rigorous panel data collections to more effectively disentangle age, cohort, and period effects on criminal victimization over the life span; and developing age-specific strategies for law enforcement and victim service providers that address the needs of the older population from both health and criminal justice policy perspectives (Lachs, Bachman, & Williams, 2004)

SEE ALSO Volume 2: *Domestic Violence;* Volume 3: *Elder Abuse and Neglect.*

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Mark Motivans

CULTURAL CAPITAL, LATER LIFE

SEE Volume 1: *Cultural Capital.*

CULTURAL IMAGES, LATER LIFE

In contemporary technological society cultural views of aging are influenced by and reflected in media portrayals, which provide a snapshot of the aging process and provide a cultural perspective on that process. Cultural images are representations of individuals, groups, and society that are captured by a communication event. That event can be a simple picture, a television program, a speech, or a song; essentially any form of communication can serve as a cultural representation.

NATURE AND EFFECTS OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

Cultural representations are important because they influence the way people view other social groups, other cultures, and even themselves; media representations serve as socialization mechanisms related to social groups. For example, exposure to television's portrayals of women in traditional roles is associated with children's development of stereotypical sex-role attitudes (Kimball, 1986). The ways in which viewers perceive other social groups is influenced by television portrayals of those groups (Harwood, 1999, Mastro, 2003). Furthermore, portrayals of social groups in the media have consequences for individuals who belong to social groups, who may come to endorse or reject particular ideas about their groups through exposure to the media (Harwood & Roy, 2005).

Additionally, media images influence the specific cognitive schemas people develop to process information about the world around them. Cognitive schemas are mental structures such as stereotypes that help individuals organize how they think about people and situations. When people are exposed to new messages, their schemas are modified (Schneider, 2004). If media images of older adults are negative, a negative stereotype or schema is likely to develop (Robinson, Gustafson, & Popovich, 2008). The activation of negative stereotypes in perceptions of older adults in turn influences communication with older adults and can lead to age-adapted communication strategies such as patronizing or demeaning communication directed at older people (Hummert, 1994, Hummert, Garstka, Ryan, & Bonnesen, 2004). The activation of age-adapted communication that is based on negative stereotypes can occur even in close family relationships such as grandparent-grandchild relationships (Anderson, Harwood, & Hummert, 2005). Thus, the potential impact of cultural images on people's interactions with one another provides a strong reason for examining the representations of older adults in multiple forms of media.

PORTRAYALS OF AGING IN MEDIA

Research on media portrayals of aging has focused mainly on prime-time television, daytime television, television advertising, and print advertising, primarily in the United States. That research has examined the presence of older adults in media, the role prominence of older adults in media, and images of aging. The most common form of research works by counting older adult characters and comparing their numbers to those in the population.

Older adult characters are defined in a variety of ways in this research (which has been something of a detriment to effective comparisons across studies). Common methods include defining a range of physical features that define old age (e.g., gray hair, noticeably wrinkled skin, use of a walking cane, etc.), defining based on relational roles (e.g., being a grandparent), or simply defining based on chronological age (e.g., cut-offs from 50 to 65 have been used). Coders demonstrate substantial levels of reliability on all these tasks. One goal for this research area should be to standardize a definition of what counts as an older character. We suspect that definitions based on chronological age are least susceptible to bias; we would advocate for work to consider multiple age groups of older adults (e.g., distinguishing 60 to 70 from 70 and above) and to avoid including characters in their 50s from consideration as "older."

In the context of age distribution estimates from census data, older adults consistently are underrepresented in prime-time television programming (Robinson & Skill, 1995, Harwood & Anderson, 2002), television advertising (Hiemstra, Goodman, Middlemiss, Vosco, & Ziegler, 1983, Miller, Leyell, & Mazachek, 2004, Roy & Harwood, 1997), and advertising in national magazines (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1990). Older adult women are particularly underrepresented relative to older men (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Several authors have concluded that this skewed representation of older women reflects a disproportionate value placed on youth for women (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). In contrast, J. Harwood and K. Anderson (2002) found that older adult men and older adult women were equally underrepresented compared with census estimates, although young adult women were found to be overrepresented relative to middle-aged women, again suggesting a bias toward youth for women.

Studies of role prominence examine whether older adults are portrayed as central characters in television shows and advertisements. Researchers have explored major roles, minor roles, and background roles in various forms of television programming. Most older adult characters in television advertisements play minor or background roles (Roy & Harwood, 1997, Swayne & Greco, 1987, Robinson, 1998). For example, A. Roy and Harwood (1997) determined that more than 50% of older adult characters in television advertisements appear in background roles. However, the percentage of older adult characters in major roles increases when the advertised product targets older adults (Robinson, 1998).

Harwood and Anderson (2002) found that the role prominence of older adult characters in prime-time comedies and dramas does not differ significantly across age groups. However, as female characters age, they become less significant to the plot compared with male characters (Gerbner et al., 1980, Vernon, Williams, Phillips, & Wilson, 1990). J. Robinson and T. Skill (1995) noted that peripheral and minor characters may be more revealing of cultural stereotypes in light of the limited ability for development of depth and complexity in those characters and the need for such characters to serve a "quick and dirty" story function. The current television landscape does not offer many older people in lead roles, but examples from the past include *Matlock*'s Andy Griffith and *Murder, She Wrote*'s Angela Lansbury. A character like the grandfather on *The Simpson's* would qualify as a supporting character, while truly peripheral characters typically have one-off background roles (e.g., a store clerk who is only seen once and says a single line).

Studies of the quality of specific images or portrayals focus on personality traits, cognitive abilities, activities and occupations, physical features, and age stereotypes related to older characters. Much of this research has found negative portrayals of older adults (Gerbner et al., 1980, Harris & Feinberg, 1977). For example, S. R. Stern and D. E. Mastro (2004) found that older adults are substantially less likely to be portrayed in occupational roles than are younger characters; their research also showed that female characters suffer particularly on this front, with virtually no older women being shown in productive occupational roles. Of course, these representations might accurately reflect levels of labor force participation among older women; nonetheless, they do also serve as powerful messages about expectations for this group and for future generations as they age.

Other researchers have uncovered more positive portrayals in prime-time television programming (Bell, 1992, Dail, 1988), cartoons (Robinson & Anderson, 2006), and television advertising (Miller et al., 2004, Roy & Harwood, 1997). For example, J. Bell (1992) focused on the prime-time television shows most watched by older adults and found a combination of positive (e.g., powerful, affluent, healthy, active, admired) and negative (e.g., eccentric, foolish, comical) stereotypical portrayals. P. W. Dail (1988) found a similar pattern of positive and negative portrayals in the perceived cognitive ability of older adult characters. Generally, the older adult characters were seen to have positive mental orientation and verbal interaction but had moments of disorientation, confusion, or forgetfulness. This research focused on a very narrow slice of programming rather than the broad areas of programming examined in studies demonstrating negative portrayals.

Research on television advertising has found that older adults generally are portrayed positively but not as positively as other age groups (Miller et al., 2004, Robinson, 1998, Swayne & Greco, 1987). For example, Roy and Harwood (1997) found that older adults were

portrayed as strong, happy, active, and lucid. However, T. E. Robinson (1998) found that the target of the advertisement played a role in the way older adults were portrayed. He examined facial expressions, personal characteristics, and behaviors of older adult characters and found that older adults generally are portrayed as mean, irritable, or grumpy, but are presented as happy when the target of the advertisement is other older adults. Advertisements targeting older adults include products such as medicine, mobility aids, and emergency alerts. Some of these studies reach conclusions about broadly positive portrayals of older adults without doing a relevant comparative examination of younger characters (Harwood, 2007). For instance, T. Robinson and C. Anderson (2006) found predominantly positive portrayals of older characters in cartoons but did not examine younger characters to determine whether those characters are portrayed even more positively. While research has not examined longitudinal trends, reviews of this literature indicate very little in the way of trends towards increasing or more positive portrayals (J. Robinson, Skill, & Turner, 2004).

Most researchers who explore images of aging in media use a quantitative content analysis method. Researchers record a representative sample of programming and analyze the quantity and quality of portrayals through the use of objective coding of characters by independent coders. However, Harwood (2000) took a different methodological approach and provided a textual analysis of one intergenerational interaction in the show *Frasier*. *Frasier* portrays the interactions between the divorced psychiatrist Dr. Frasier Crane; his psychiatrist brother, Niles; and their father, Martin, a retired police officer. Harwood's analysis demonstrated that this intergenerational interaction included a high level of age salience. The intergenerational bonding that occurred demonstrated a duality of tension between portraying the older adult as counterstereotypical and simultaneously using the stereotype of older adults as forgetful to create humor in the interaction. Thus, although the older adult character generally is portrayed positively, Harwood argues that the lurking incoherence of the portrayal is problematic because it relies on and reinforces the negative stereotypes of aging. Harwood and Giles (1992) reached similar conclusions concerning (counter)-stereotypical portrayals in *The Golden Girls,* which focuses on three retired women who live together in Florida, along with the mother of one of the retirees.

EFFECTS OF MEDIA IMAGES ON VIEWERS

The effects of media portrayals of aging can be divided into effects on older and younger viewers. A concern in regard to older viewers has been with the effects on their own orientation and attitudes toward aging. M. M. Donlon, O. Ashman, and B. R. Levy (2005), for instance, examined the long-term effects of media consumption by measuring an estimate of life-time television consumption—they multiplied number of years of television viewing by the average number of hours viewed in the current year. They found that older individuals (age 60 to 92) with larger life-span exposure to television have significantly more negative stereotypes of aging than do those with less television exposure (e.g., they were more likely to rate other elders as grumpy or senile). Television exposure accounted for more than 10% of the variance in negative stereotyping, more than did health, depression, education, or age. This research illustrates the potential for television to reinforce self-stereotyping among older adults and ultimately lead to more negative experiences of aging.

Experimental studies have examined whether specific types of portrayals affect different types of older people in different ways. M-L. Mares and J. Cantor (1992) examined whether positive versus negative portrayals of older adults affected depression scores among lonely and nonlonely older viewers. Their findings indicated that older people who are not lonely are made more depressed by seeing negative media images of older people (e.g., images portraying an older person as depressed and socially isolated). In contrast, the same images made lonely older people less depressed. The second finding is explained by the authors in terms of social comparison processes: For individuals who are experiencing problems in their lives, seeing that they are not alone and that others are similarly isolated may serve a comforting function, conveying the message that their distress is not unique to them. This work demonstrates that not all older people respond to portrayals of older adults in the same manner and thus draws attention to the fact that an ideal portrayal of older adults on television will be characterized not by simple positivity but by diversity.

Similar concerns exist in regard to younger people. Gerbner et al. (1980) examined whether overall television consumption is associated with perceptions of the prevalence of older people in the population. As might be expected in light of the data on underrepresentation presented above, teens who viewed a lot of television tended to see older adults as constituting a smaller proportion of the total population compared with those who watched less television. These heavy television viewers also had more negative attitudes about aging. The effect sizes here are small, and there has been discussion about whether they persist when other factors are statistically controlled (Passuth & Cook, 1985).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There are relatively limited theoretical frameworks to utilize in examining the content of media portrayals of older adults. One common option is to base such work on media effects theories. For instance, the content analysis of Gerbner et al. (1980) is grounded in cultivation theory, which says that heavy viewers of television will come to view the television world as the "real world," and so their mental representations of the world will come to resemble television. If that is the case, then there is need to understand the television world in more detail. Similar rationales can be developed that are based on, for instance, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002). This theory would suggest that individuals are more likely to model (learn and imitate) behavior that is performed by attractive media characters. That approach would recommend examining interactions between younger and older characters on television in terms of the attractiveness of the younger persons. Younger viewers would be more likely to adopt intergenerational behaviors modeled by attractive peers; therefore, seeing discriminatory or patronizing behavior by a younger person on television would be more potentially damaging if the young person was attractive. No such work has been done, but it presents a productive theoretically driven direction for future research. This perspective also draws attention to the need for more extensive examinations of intergenerational interaction on television. Very little work has considered how older people and younger people talk to one another on television or the effects of those images on the well-being of and interactions among young and old adults.

An alternative to the effects-oriented approach has been described by Harwood and Anderson (2002). They suggest examining media content from an ethnolinguistic vitality perspective (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977, Harwood, Giles, & Bourhis, 1994). Vitality theory describes the various facets that contribute to a group's strength in society through a systematic examination of sociostructural features such as demography, social status, and institutional support. For instance, groups in the majority with support from government and with a history of societal prestige will exercise more power in most societies than minority groups with a history of exclusion and oppression. Within the category of institutional support, Giles et al. (1977) define media institutions as important, and other work has corroborated the importance of media in determining group vitality (Abrams, Eveland, & Giles, 2003, Harwood & Roy, 2005). Vitality theory specifies media representation as an important topic independent of effects in light of its role as a component of a theoretically grounded understanding of where groups stand in society. Thus, cultural representations provide a socialization function within

groups as well as reflecting a broader perception of how the dominant culture views various social groups.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As was noted above, research exploring the intergenerational interactions portrayed on prime-time television could provide additional insight into the role of socialization of media portrayals. Researchers could expand their methodological approach by incorporating mixed methods to explore both the presence and the portrayal of older adults through content analysis and the interactions portrayed through discourse analysis. Furthermore, research that explores the effects of these types of interactions on young adults' perceptions of older adults could provide theoretical support for the media effects approach. That approach often is used as a rationale for doing content analytic work on cultural images of aging

CULTURAL VALUES AND CHINESE MEDIA

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Media representations of aging have been explored in various cultural contexts outside North America, including India, Germany, Britain, South Korea (Lee, Kim, & Han, 2006), and China (Zhang, Harwood, Williams Ylanne-McEwen, Wadleigh, & Thimm, 2006). Y. B. Zhang and J. Harwood (2004) support the conclusion that a norm of respect for older adults is salient in Chinese television advertisements. Filial piety (*Xiao*) is a cultural norm that is based on the traditional Confucian values of hierarchy and respect for elders; it is clear from their research that advertisers use this value to make their products appeal to consumers. Ads for health-related products, for instance, include tag lines suggesting that the parents' health is the responsibility of the child. Zhang and Harwood's (2004) research explores the extent to which modernization and globalization of Chinese culture is reflected in representations on Chinese television. These authors note the continued presence of traditional themes, but often blended with themes relating to progress, technology, and individual gratification. Themes emphasizing a value of "youth" are also strong in Chinese advertising; Lin (2001) suggested that this is in part a function of the one-child policy, which has resulted in a "little emperor/empress" phenomenon for couples with a single child.

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in the media, but the effects of and impact on real-world intergenerational encounters has not been explored.

Particular areas of content are also deserving of more attention than they have received. In particular, considerable research shows that older adults prefer informational and educational programming (news, etc.) to entertainment programming (sitcoms, etc.) (Riggs, 1996, Robinson, Skill, & Turner, 2004). However, relatively little is known about how older people are portrayed in news programming and other news sources (e.g., newspapers, educational programs, C-Span, quiz shows). Examination of such programs would help researchers understand whether the types of media preferred by older people are the types that portray older people in greater numbers or in a more positive or diverse fashion. Additionally, as generational shifts occur the type of program that older people consume are likely to change. Future research should explore whether the influence of the baby boomers on the media preferences of older adults.

SEE ALSO Volume 3: *Age Identity; Ageism/Age Discrimination.*

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