Extended Abstract

The Representation of Aging in Television Series

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate aging’s dimensional construction and representation from a sociocultural and critical perspective, and then analyze its representation on television. Content analysis was used in analyzing 99 elderly characters from 26 television series in order to demonstrate how they are represented. While the dominant form of relationship is shaped around the family, social support mostly proceeds in an emotional dimension; the social support given is more pronounced than the social support received. The percentages for stress that is given or received are equal, while elderly female characters have been stereotyped more than elderly male characters. The main forms of stereotypes are golden age and physical, cognitive, and emotional weakness. The mythoi of aging that are transferred to the nine characters are disease and disability, depression, loneliness, crankiness, and amnesia. A discourse on explicit age discrimination was observed in only one character, but no discourse on death could be found for any of the characters.

Keywords
Fear of aging • Media and aging • Aging and representation • Death-denying culture

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In Western culture, rejuvenation and living longer are themes with a long history (Gilbert, 2007, p. 81). Thus, exploring public images of aging that are defined from a youth-centered culture is important from two aspects. The first one is that public images reflect and formalize social attitudes towards elderly people, and the second one is that it affects individual perceptions of self for constructing their personal identity as they advance in age (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2007, p. 735).

How is aging offered as an object of fear, which begins in childhood through tales, films, and urban legends, despite being seen as a natural step of human life? How is the relationship between death and aging built? How is a culture that denies death shaped? After analyzing these questions socio-culturally through critical conceptualization, the main question of this research becomes “How is aging represented in prime-time Turkish TV series?”

One can say it makes sense to discuss a culture that denies death and makes aging invisible, as well as the relationship of aging, death, and fear of aging based on social and cultural interpretations. Therefore, this research theoretically evaluates fear of aging under two headings: sociocultural approaches and critical approaches.

**Sociocultural Approaches**

The theoretical complexity of the concept of age presents a unique perspective to sociologists for explaining the processes of self and identity, as well as for examining how cultural and social inequality are produced/reproduced. Age is an element of one’s social identity, like gender and ethnicity (Barrett, Redmond, & von Rohr, 2012, pp. 329–331).

Martens, Goldenberg, and Greenberg (2005) evaluated the causes of fear and negative reactions to this important element of social identity to be fear of death, reduced physical strength, and loss of self-confidence. Fear of death is about when people see someone who is older and view this person’s fate as something unavoidable for themselves because older individuals are potential reminders about the future, which is inescapably accompanied with troubles, death, reduced physical strength, and loss of self-confidence.

**Critical Approaches**

Critical approaches toward aging, or critical gerontology, asks these major questions: Who benefits from and who is harmed by the normative standards of dominant culture? What are the reasons that a specific pattern reaches a dominant position? How can society age better? What is a good life? In accordance with critical approaches, in order to understand aging and its problems, one must understand and analyze the effects of gender, social class, ethnicity, and socio-economic inequalities.
In reference to gender and age-based approaches, our bodies express something much more than a place for health and disease. As such, our bodies are an interface of meaning between public and private life (Holstein & Minkler, 2003, pp. 789–790).

**Methodology**

This research intends to analyze the representation of aging on TV, its main question being “How is aging represented in prime-time TV series?”

To this end, content analysis was used in analyzing 99 elderly characters from 26 television series in order to demonstrate how they are represented. The content analysis coding form was developed from the previous studies of Kessler, Rakoczy, and Staudinger (2004), Lee, Carpenter, and Meyers (2007), Manges (2007), Thornton (2002), and Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005).

The purposive sampling method was used in determining TV series (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014, p. 90). In this context, the sample was chosen based on the condition that the series must be rated in the top 10 overall for its time-slot. In addition, to increase the diversity of series both categorically (family, crime, drama, action) and quantitatively, a different day was determined for each month by specifying a different day in the first week of every month (e.g. Monday for January, Tuesday for February).

One series didn’t have any elderly characters; in total, there were 99 elderly characters in 26 series. Research results indicate that elderly male characters are more visible than elderly female characters, the education level of these characters is generally unclear, and the employment status is quite low among these characters.

Elderly characters with a high economic status are very distinct; about half of the characters have a child. Portraying characters’ health status as substantially good can be interpreted as avoiding negative mythoi and stereotypical constructions towards them.

Many characters were seen to be related to a type of emotion; they provide social support in a certain context and direction. In other words, elderly characters are reflected as individuals who give social support rather than receive it. This situation can be associated with the perception of benefitting from their “vital experiences.”

Within the context of the direction of social stress, the percentages of those who give and those who receive are equal, and elderly female characters are stereotyped more than elderly male characters. The main forms of stereotypes are “golden age” and “physical, cognitive, and emotional weakness.” For aging mythos, “illness and disability” and “depression, loneliness, and moodiness” are prominent.
Kaynakça/References


