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Caring with dignity? Understanding ageist communication from the perspective of Canadian seniors in long term care facilities

Western culture not only strongly stresses an individualistic paradigm that values independence and economic productivity, but it also nourishes a profoundly fearful rapport with death. Such a paradigm paves the way for ageist beliefs and attitudes toward the elderly, mostly frail elderly who are often portrayed, in public discourses at least, as a burden to society. Ageism is often expressed in the most implicit and subtle manner, notably through patronized communication. The first goal of this study was to understand how institutionalized elders assess communication with caregivers and specifically whether they perceive that such communication is ageist. The second and third goals were to determine ageism's impact on well-being in regards to quality of life in the home, as well as on elders' coping strategies. To do so, qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample of 33 seniors living in four public long-term care facilities in the province of Quebec (Canada). Results reveal that the large majority of elderly identified ageist communication and attitudes through their daily interactions with caregivers. Moreover, participants who felt were the target of ageist communication and attitudes tend to be dissatisfied in terms of quality of life in the home. Finally, data analysis show that participants predominantly rely on avoidance strategies and to a much lesser extent on confrontational strategies to deal with ageist situations. Results are discussed in the context of long term care, aging, ageism and communication.

Biography

Martine Lagacé holds a PhD in Experimental Psychology and is currently an Associate Professor at the Department of Communication (University of Ottawa). She has done extensive research on the topic of ageism, exploring its causes and consequences from the perspective of older workers as well retired and/or frail seniors. She has published several books and papers in reputed journals addressing ageing and ageism and has been serving as an Editorial Board Member of reputed journals.

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