

# Getting old is Beautiful, inside But not outside. A Critical Analysis of Media Depiction of Aging Disabilities

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**ABSTRACT:** This study argues with the misrepresentation that aging inevitably leads to physical and mental disabilities. Based on the critical analyses of selected media portrayals, the study aims to discuss the literary elements embedded in the poem “The Panic of Growing Older” by Peter Lenrie and how these frames aging and disabilities, to ascertain how public transit users perceive aging and disabilities from Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) that intends to promote priority seating for seniors and to examine the cinematic elements in the psychological drama “The Father” and how these portrays aging and disabilities. The Social Construction of Reality Theory (SCRT) is adopted for the theoretical discourse of the study, which employs a mixed research method (discourse analysis and survey). While discourse analysis guides the critical discussion of the elements embedded in the poem and film, an 11-item questionnaire on 5-point Likert scale was designed and distributed to randomly selected public transit (SEPTA) users right on transit ( $N = \infty$ ,  $n = 25$ ). Cross tabulations and stacked bar charts are used in the visualization of data and a chi-square test of independence reports  $\chi^2 = 30.114$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ . The Cramer’s value of 0.776 indicates a strong association between the need for an alternative sticker and the perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I ( $H_3$ ). The research also found that media misrepresentation of the elderly fuels ageist stereotypes and SW<sup>2</sup>I, which prioritize seats for the elderly, contribute to the false belief that getting older inherently causes physical disabilities and incorrectly classify people with physical disabilities together with the elderly. Arguing with this, the study highlights that healthy lifestyle choices guided by geriatrics can help older adults prevent the onset of some mental and physical health problems, and the elderly can possibly possess incredible energy and determination against this stereotype.

*Media Misrepresentation, Aging, Disability, Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I), Disability logo, Ageist Stereotypes*

## I. Introduction

The way ageism is portrayed in the media might amplify a preexisting societal problem (Loos & Ivan, 2018). Continuous exposure to erroneous media information that perpetuates ageism can sustain severe misperceptions of aging and disabilities. This study investigates the potential of Public Information Messages (PIMs), literature and films to create and sustain harmful stereotypes about aging. The concern here is the impact of such ill perpetuation on the elderly, showing how it makes them feel marginalized. Marier and Revelli (2017) asserts

that the media reinforces negative preconceptions about the elderly by focusing on their physical problems and limitations and downplaying their intelligence, skills, and accomplishments. In their analysis of media portrayals of the aged, Lytle, Monahan, and Levy (2023) found that health difficulties and disabilities are frequently featured. The vast array of aural and visual material found in literature, movies, and PIMs is what qualifies them as "media" in the context of this research. Many types of popular media have a negative portrayal of the elderly, portraying them as helpless, dependent, and sick. The media's depiction of the elderly worsens prejudice because it reinforces negative stereotypes and diminishes the importance of their abilities and achievements because of the fear of their physical deterioration. Most depictions of the elderly in literature show them to be weak, ill, and unable to participate in society (Harris, 2020). These pictures make people believe that becoming older is always a downer and that people at a certain age do not have anything worthwhile to offer the world again.

Similarly, it is common practice for films depicting aging to emphasize the difficulties and physical decline that come with the aging process. The widespread portrayal of the elderly as weak and easily disregarded fuels the perpetuation of unfavorable age stereotypes (DeFalco, 2010), and such perpetuation is not a part of the social responsibility of the media as considered by Inyang and Essien (2021). Additionally, public service providers run the risk of unintentionally reinforcing negative stereotypes about the elderly, such as the idea of physical weakness and different degrees of infirmity, when they use publicly available instructional materials. In contrast to disabilities like deafness, blindness, or muscular spasticity, the intrinsic limitations associated with aging are frequently overlooked (Andrews, 2019). Maritain (2023) argues that poetry has the potential to highlight the limitations of aging and the frequently neglected parts of the process. By using introspective poetry, poets challenge readers to reconsider oversimplified notions and get a more balanced comprehension of the complexity of aging, thereby dispelling widespread misunderstandings about the process. One poem that delves into this theme is "*The Span of Life*," written by Robert Frost in 1936. In it, Frost contemplates the transition from youth to old age. Frost deftly uses introspective tone and powerful imagery to bring attention to how society perceives aging as a decline rather than a synthesis of life's experiences. The poem contends that the lack of openness to the richness and diversity of the life of the elderly is the root cause of many misconceptions around aging.

"*The Old Fools*", a poetic piece of writing by Larkin (1973), delves with the topic of prejudice and the treatment of the old in society. While challenging common misconceptions about becoming older, Larkin's poignant poetry highlights the individuality of each person's experience of aging. No matter what happens to their brains, he highlights how rich their knowledge and life experience are. The poem aspires to cultivate empathy and comprehension by prompting readers to reevaluate their prejudices and preconceptions toward the elderly. Sylvia Plath's "*Mirror*" is a poem from 1963 that explores the consequences of aging as seen through a non-living object; a mirror. Despite living in a world that often places too much emphasis on outer appearances, the poem skillfully portrays the anxiety and fretfulness that accompany aging. Plath's portrayal of the mirror as an objective witness to the passage of time reflects the impact of societal expectations on an individual's self-perception.

In 1958, Cummings released a poem titled "*Old Age Sticks*," which challenges the notion that aging is solely manifested through external changes. Cummings shows that aging is a growing, living aspect of being using unconventional language and punctuation. Physical limitations do not hinder older people; on the contrary, they exhibit incredible tenacity and adaptation (Cummings, 1958). According to the poetry, physical restrictions are less significant than the pleasure of learning and the accumulation of significant life experiences. The ability of poetry to convey contemporary thoughts and debunk stereotypes about the difficulties of aging is demonstrated by these poems. Poets examine the mental and emotional changes that come with being older to question accepted norms and broaden their audience's worldview. Since many young people are afraid of aging, this study aims to disprove the myth that becoming older always means falling behind and instead highlight the

concept that aging is not necessarily associated with deterioration. Poems by William Butler Yeats, Robert Dodsley, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, "*When You Are Old*," "*The Old Man's Complaint*," and "*The Death of the Old Year*," respectively, provide opposing viewpoints.

One out of the numerous PIMs considered in this research is the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I). The use of stickers and posters using the wheelchair emblem has increased significantly during the past several years. These are being circulated to bring attention to the matter of public transportation seating preferences for those with impairments and the elderly. A subtle way to bring attention to the fact that there are specific seating areas for those with disabilities and the elderly is to use the wheelchair emblem and raise awareness of these areas. These visual clues provide credence to the idea that aging makes one more vulnerable to impairments, which might have unforeseen consequences. Although not all elderly people have mobility challenges, it is important to remember that certain may be quite common in this age group (Heide, 2021). Even if the intentions behind these endeavors are good, we must consider the potential negative effects of these visual clues on the idea that aging is always associated with flaws

Although there are various film industries in the world, this research focuses on Hollywood and how the narrative structures and storytelling have been shaped by the beliefs and traditions of its host nations and civilizations. The Hollywood film industry has exerted significant influence in the entertainment sector for over a century, establishing itself as a widely acknowledged symbol of cinema (Baumann, 2007). Hollywood has emerged as the focal point of American film production, renowned for its high-grossing releases, glamorous premieres, and relentless pursuit of artistic brilliance. Nevertheless, this approach has a drawback: many Hollywood movies depict aging in an erroneous manner, perhaps fostering attitudes that mistreat and denigrate the old. For instance, in movies like "*The Bucket List*" and "*Up*," the narrative is structured in a way that consistently links aging with both cognitive and physical ailments.

"*The Bucket List*" is a poignant film directed by Reiner (2007), featuring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. The movie revolves around two individuals facing terminal diseases who go on a journey to fulfill their unfulfilled dreams during their last days. The video delves into the themes of friendship and existential fulfillment, while also perpetuating the detrimental notion that aging is synonymous with vulnerability and mortality. The characters' health problems symbolize the inevitable physical and mental decline that comes with aging. The portrayal of aging in "*The Bucket List*" revolves around the challenges faced by the characters in dealing with diseases and physical limitations. The narrative is organized around the concept that bodily functions decline as one ages, owing to the abundance of medical imagery and discussions centered on health. The film inadvertently reinforces the erroneous notion that aging inevitably results in physical impairment, by placing significant focus on the deteriorating health of the main characters.

The animated film "*Up*" directed by Docter (2009) recounts the poignant tale of Carl Fredricksen, an elderly widower, who attaches several balloons to his house to fulfill his dream of venturing toward South America. The film portrays Carl as a frail and isolated elderly individual burdened by his physical constraints, contributing to the unfavorable caricature of aging, despite its acclaimed artistic and emotional complexity. Carl's advanced age is emphasized in the film "*Up*" by his hunched posture, uncoordinated walking, and reliance on a cane. The idea that aging is associated with a decline in energy and physical power is further emphasized by the juxtaposition between the protagonist's youthful and weakened state in the opening scene of the film, and his aged and diminished state later. The film's visual aesthetics exacerbate the misinterpretation by reinforcing unfavorable preconceived notions about the elderly and their purported limitations.

Both "*Up*" and "*The Bucket List*" have a common story theme that depicts aging as a time when mental and physical abilities decline. While these films aim to illuminate human experience, they inadvertently perpetuate the impression that aging is linked to limitations thus driving the problem of Gerascophobia (the fear of growing

old). A study conducted by Forbes Health in 2023 found that young people who constitute >13% of the US population are the most hit by Gerascophobia and this presents a concern to the current research. In the light of this concern, this study aims to show the relevance and efforts of Geriatrics (the branch of medicine that specializes in the care of elderly individuals), Thus, ensuring that young people have the assurance of receiving sufficient care that ensures a robust and healthy elderly life.

## II. Objectives of the Study/Hypothesis

### 2.1 Study's Objectives

Hence, to dispel the misconception that aging inevitably leads to physical infirmities and mental decline, perpetuated by some literary expressions, film productions, and public transit notices, this study will be directed by the following objectives:

1. To ascertain how public transit users perceive aging and disabilities from Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) that intends to promote priority seating
2. To critically discuss the literary elements embedded in the poem "*The Panic of Growing Older*" by Peter Lenrie and how these frames aging and disabilities.
3. To examine the cinematic elements in the psychological drama "*The Father*" directed by Florian Zeller and how these portrays aging and disabilities

### 2.2 Research Hypotheses

Given that the first research objective draws on the impact of the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) on public transit users' perception of aging, this leads to the formulation of hypotheses that will guide this aspect of the research towards determining whether;

1. **Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)**: There is no significant correlation between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.  
**Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>)**: There is significant correlation between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.
2. **Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)**: There is no significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.  
**Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>)**: There is significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.
3. **Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)**: There is no significant correlation between the need for an alternative sticker and the public transit users' perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.  
**Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>)**: There is significant correlation between the need for an alternative sticker and the public transit users' perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.

## III. Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically grounded on the Social Construction of Reality theory, formulated by Berger and Luckmann in 1966. According to this ideology, objective and pre-existing reality does not exist. Instead, our perception and interaction with the media shape all we see and feel (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Rather than depending only on objective facts, this theory posits that language, communication, and institutional processes impact our social reality. Literature and cinema both deals extensively with the topic of language and its power to shape social reality (Collins, 2016). Not only that, but phrases and symbols convey societal and cultural meanings in and of themselves. Everyone contributes to the development and upkeep of a shared understanding

by talking about what they have been through and using methods that help build and solidify these interpretations (Haslanger, 2012). This phenomenon of language includes not just one-on-one conversations, but also larger social systems and organizations.

The importance of one's social rank and the duties that come with it are at the heart of the idea, according to Elder-Vass (2012). As stated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), people are expected to act in particular ways based on the social roles they play in society. Each of these responsibilities helps shape our perceptions of the world and how we respond to it. According to Berger and Luckmann (2023), regular participation in activities like role-playing and bargaining is necessary for developing a common understanding. Cultural expectations of old age are influenced by media portrayals of aging and physical limitations, which reinforce simplified and stereotyped views of reality. These stories make people feel worse about themselves because of their age, and those feelings could follow them into retirement. Their failure to address the great diversity of aging relationships is problematic.

Lytle et al. (2023) asserts that the media promotes a negative portrayal of aging by emphasizing its physical limits and neglecting the value of knowledge, flexibility, and resilience exhibited by older individuals. Because prejudiced representations may influence public sentiment, policymaking, and resource distribution, the marginalization of entire groups can persist. Worryingly, media portrayals of aging often ignore socioeconomic considerations. The media's fixation on declining physical health as we age overstates the impact of societal and economic factors as well as personal lifestyle choices. The apparent lack of complexity in assessing the pros and cons of aging is brought to light by the topic's seeming simplicity. The media tends to focus on the negative aspects of aging when reporting on health concerns related to it. Molek-Kozakowska (2016) says that this biased depiction blatantly displays ageism. The fact that this phenomenon influences both public and private perceptions of the elderly set up a vicious loop that cannot be broken.

#### IV. Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the cultural degradation that older people and persons with disabilities experience using a mix of survey research and discourse analysis. Creative techniques in literature, film, and public transit notices are all taken into consideration. The discussion here centres on "*The Panic of Growing Older*," a 1967 poem by Lenrie Peters. This poem was selected with intention due to its profound examination of aging and impairment. This methodology briefly analysed the poem's composition, linguistic elements, and subject matter to ascertain its intended significance. This methodology was employed in the research to ascertain the poet's intended message, decipher the significance of the imagery and symbolism, and unravel the underlying themes and emotions. Also, the 2020 psychological drama "*The Father*" by Florian Zeller is also analysed using this method. This Hollywood film was selected for the research owing to its inherent exploration of the process of aging, which the scriptwriter adeptly integrated into the narrative that revolves around the topic of mental infirmity. The research focused on these characteristics due to their contributions in comprehending the film's narrative.

Moreover, to gather relevant information from a primary perspective, an 11-item questionnaire based on 5-point Likert scale was designed and distributed to randomly selected public transit users right on transit ( $N = \infty$ ,  $n = 25$ ), whose responses had made up the survey approach of the mixed method. Study participants were selected because of their usage of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) public vehicles (when the study was conducted) where priority seats reservation notices for seniors and people with disabilities are publicly on display using the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I). Crosstabulations and stacked bar chart is employed in the visualization of the categorical variables that inform the formulated hypotheses in the study;

1. **Hypothesis 1:** There is significant correlation between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.

2. **Hypothesis 2:** There is significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.
3. **Hypothesis 3:** There significant correlation between the need for an alternative sticker and the public transit users' perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I

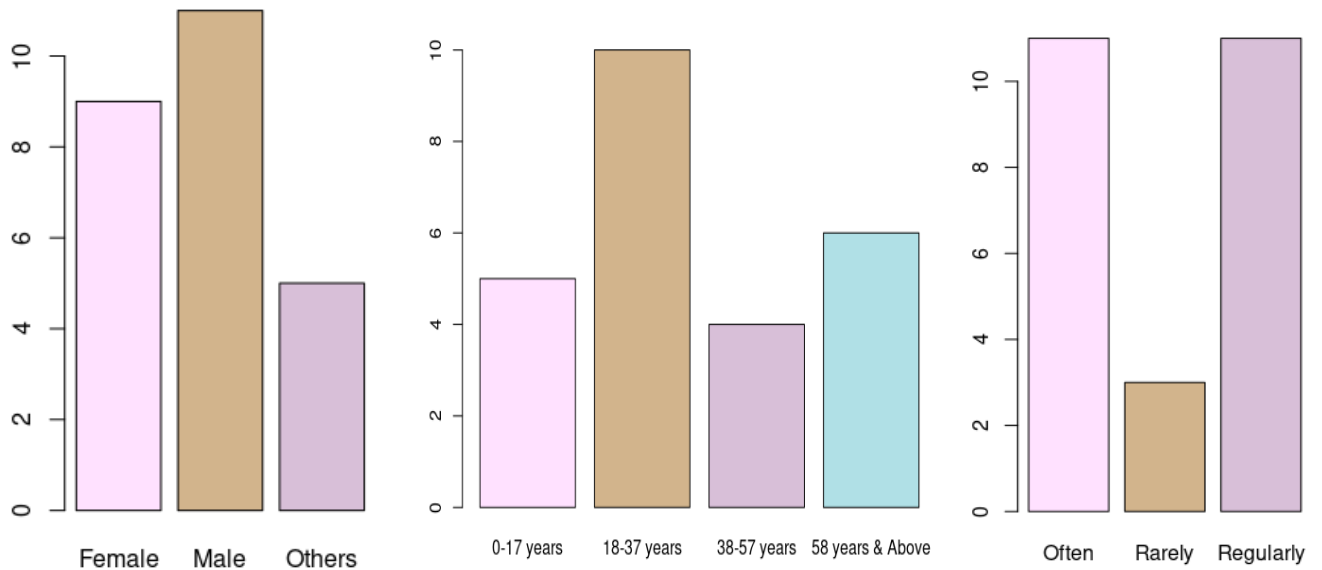
The use of crosstabs and stacked bar chart allows the researcher to conduct a comparative analysis of the frequencies of two categorical variables through the examination of their cross tabulated outcomes and this study specifically examines the statistical significance of the hypotheses using the chi-square test.

## V. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis (Charts and Tables)

Demographic/Transit Use - Responses from the Survey

Gender		Age		Transit Use	
f	%	f	%	f	%

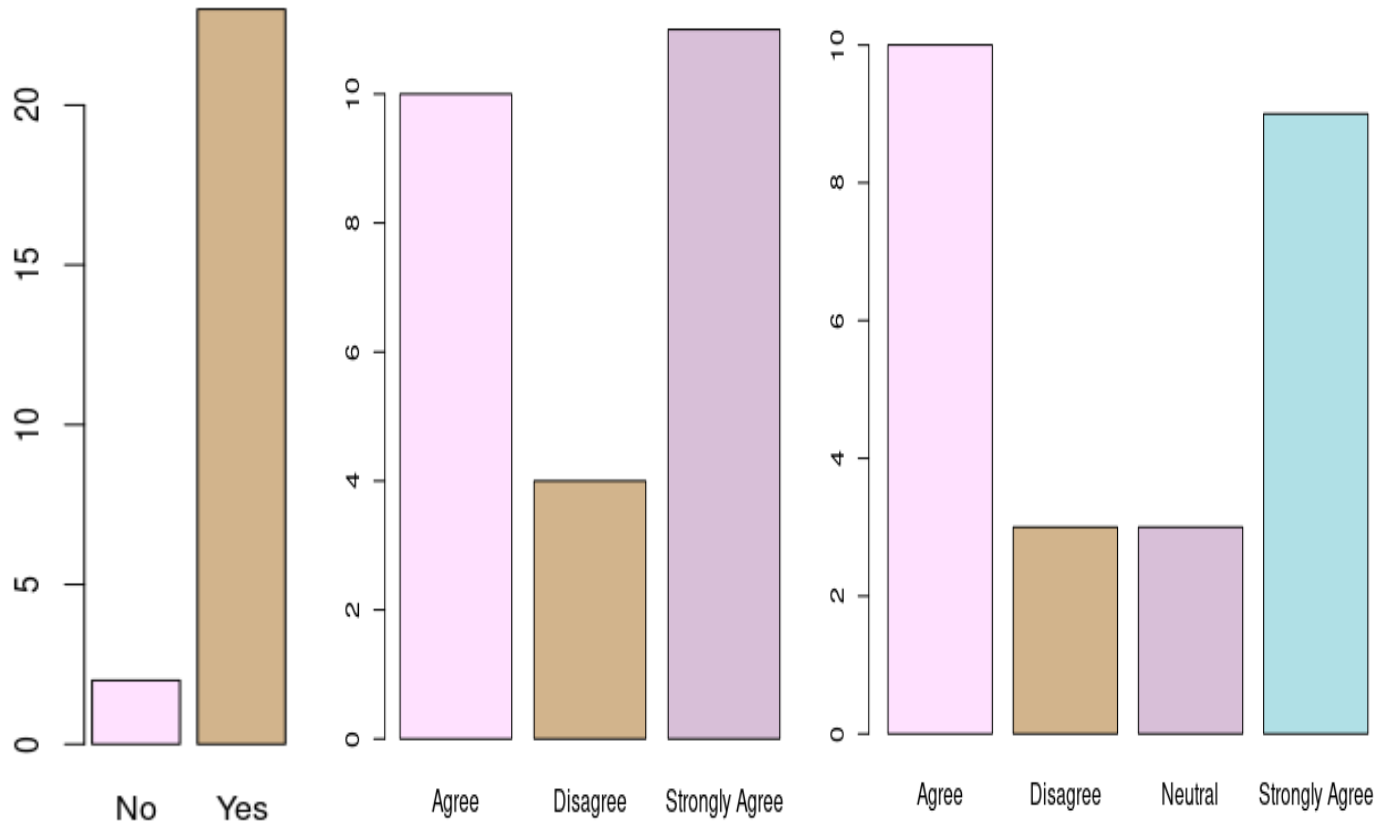


Male	11	44.0	0-17	05	20.0	Often	11	44.0
Female	09	36.0	18-37	10	40.0	Rarely	03	12.0
Others	05	20.0	38-57	04	16.0	Regularly	11	44.0
Total	25	100%	58 & Above	06	24.0	Total	25	100%
			Total	25	100%			

The presented Table and Charts indicate that most of the participants self-identified as male, accounting for 44% of the total respondents. Additionally, a significant proportion of the respondents fell within the age bracket of 18-37 years, comprising 40% of the whole sample. A respective total of 44% of the participants acknowledged their frequent and consistent use of the SEPTA public transit system.

Aging and Physical Disabilities Responses from the Survey

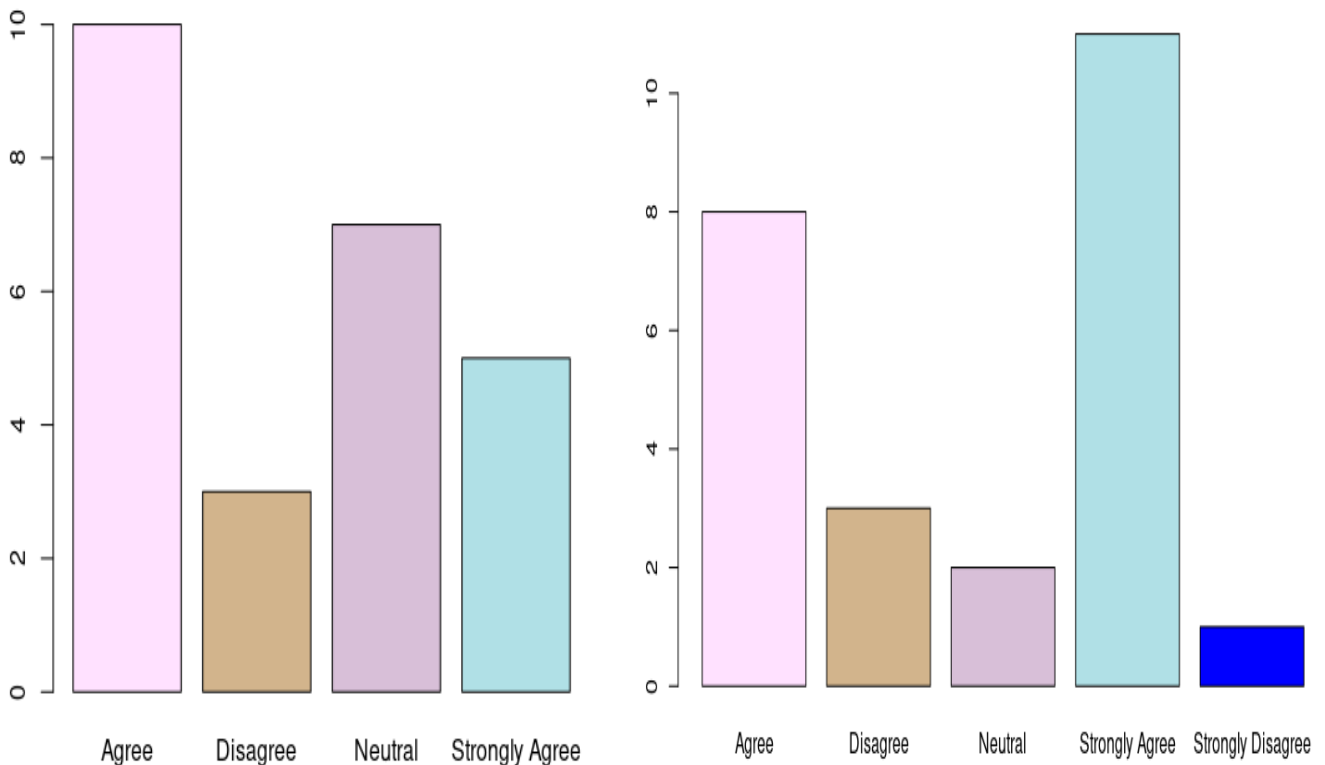
SW <sup>2</sup> I Sticker			Aging Disabilities			Class Merging		
	f	%		f	%		f	%



No	02	08.0	Strongly Agree	11	44.0	Strongly Agree	09	36.0
Yes	23	92.0	Agree	10	40.0	Agree	10	40.0
Total	25	100%	Disagree	04	16.0	Disagree	03	12.0
			Total	25	100%	Neutral	03	12.0
						Total	25	100%

From the Table and Chart, most of the respondents (92%) admitted that they do notice the SW<sup>2</sup>I on SEPTA vehicles. 44% of the respondents admits that the use of Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) to prioritize seats for seniors in public vehicles causes them to believe that aging inevitably results in physical disabilities. Most of the respondents (76%) admit that public transit operators do not intend to imply through the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) that aging causes disabilities, but these cues (stickers) tend to merge these different classes of people together.

Age Difficulties and Stereotype Responses from the Survey

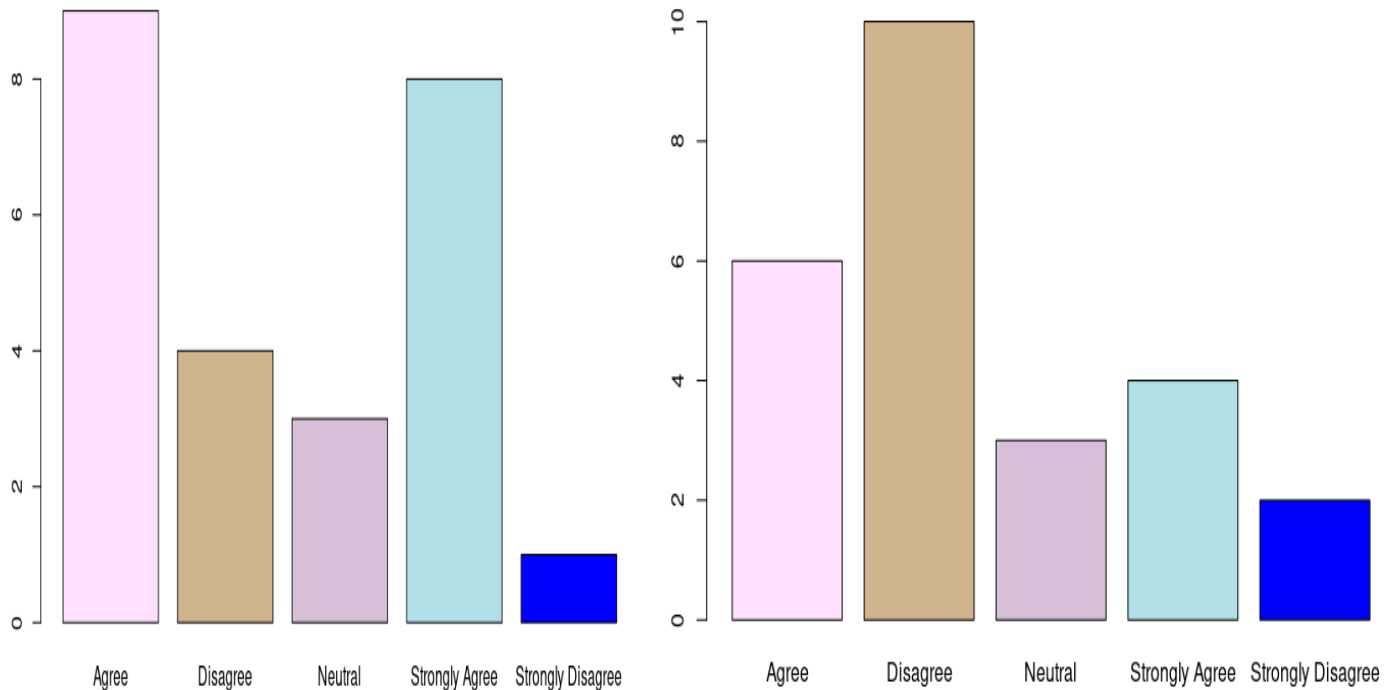


Age Difficulties			Stereotype Perpetuation		
	f	%		f	%
Strongly Agree	05	20.0	Strongly Agree	11	44.0
Agree	10	40.0	Agree	8	32.0
Disagree	03	12.0	Strongly Disagree	1	04.0
Neutral	07	28.0	Disagree	3	12.0
Total	25	100%	Neutral	2	8.0
			Total	25	100%

The data provided in the Table and Charts reveals that most of the participants (60%) acknowledge that the presence of Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) on SEPTA public transit frequently prompts contemplation regarding the challenges that older individuals may encounter just due to their age. Most participants (76%) also hold the belief that the continued use of Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) as a means of prioritizing seats for elderly adults would contribute to the perpetuation of a prevailing misconception that older individuals are inherently delicate.



Alternative Icon and Class Grouping Responses from the Survey



Alternative Sticker			Class Grouping		
	f	%		f	%
Strongly Agree	08	32.0	Strongly Agree	4	16.0
Agree	09	36.0	Agree	6	24.0
Strongly Disagree	04	16.0	Strongly Disagree	2	08.0
Disagree	01	04.0	Disagree	10	40.0
Neutral	03	12.0	Neutral	3	12.0
Total	25	100%	Total	25	100%

From the Table and Chart presented above, most of the respondents (68%) feel that an alternative sticker that does not imply that physical disabilities are an inevitable part of becoming older should replace the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I). Few respondents (40%) feel that there is absolutely nothing wrong if the elderly individuals are grouped together with people with disabilities through the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) cues that prioritizes their seats. Conversely, majority of the participants (48%) hold the belief that there is an issue with this.

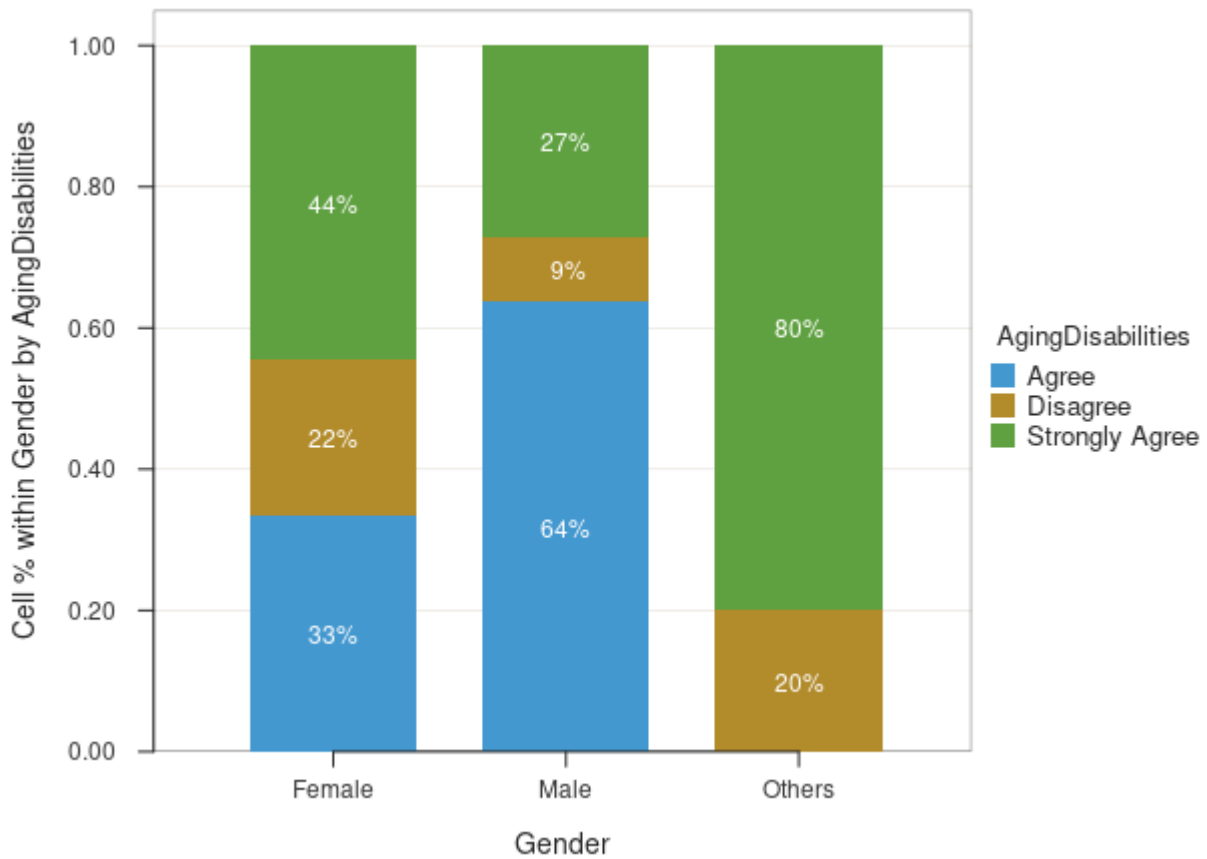
### 5.2 Crosstabulation

The formulated hypotheses would be analyzed in this section of the study using tables and stacked bar charts;

#### Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant correlation between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I; Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): There is significant correlation between the gender

of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.



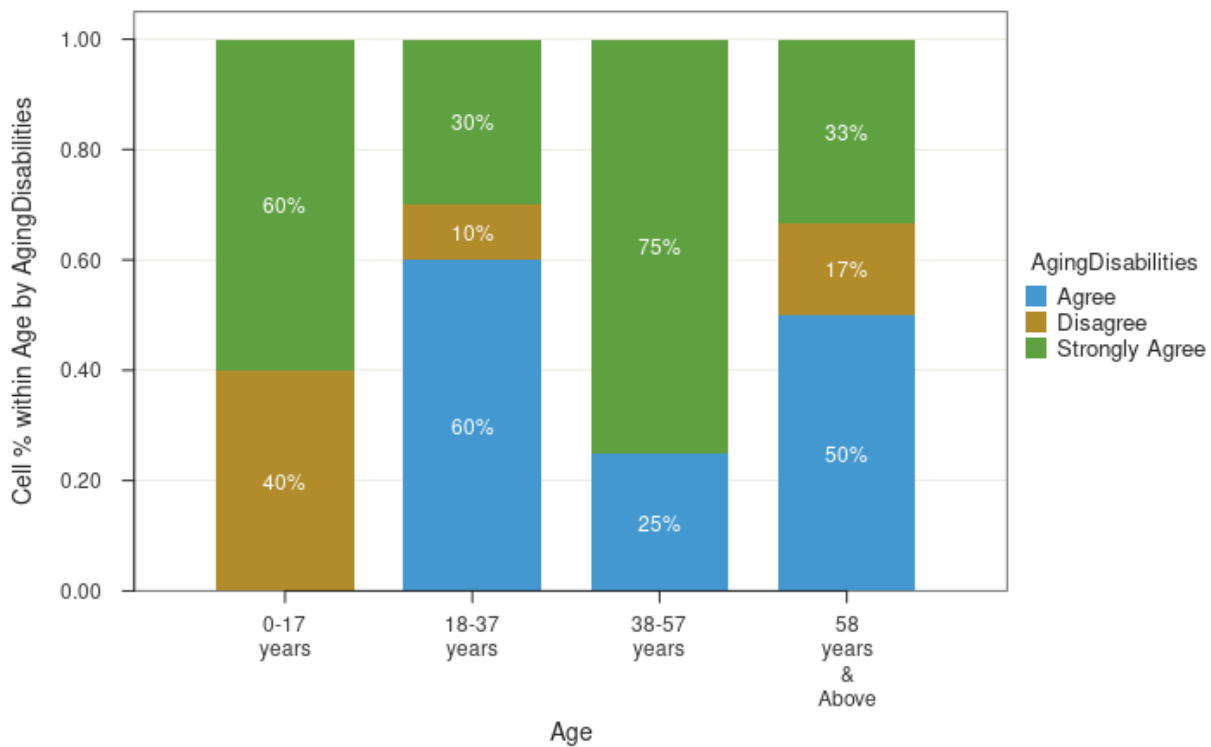
<i>Aging Disabilities</i>	<i>Gender</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Others</i>	
<i>Agree</i>	33%	64%	-	10
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	45%	27%	80%	11
<i>Disagree</i>	22%	9%	20%	4
<i>Total (N)</i>	100% (9)	100%(11)	100%(5)	25

The charts and table above offer valuable information into the relationship between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon(SW<sup>2</sup>I). These show that more of the Male respondents perceive the perpetuation of aging stereotypes from the stickers than the female respondents. However, to know the statistical significance of the results and the relationship, we computed a chi-square test of independence. The data of the Chi-square Test:  $\chi^2 = 6.405$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.171$ . The Cramer's value of 0.358 indicates a moderate association between gender and perceptions of aging from the stickers. Since the  $p\text{-value}$  (0.171) is greater than the conventional significance level (0.05), we fail to reject the

null hypothesis. Therefore, we admit that there is no significant correlation between the gender of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.

**Hypothesis 2**

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I; Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>): There is significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.



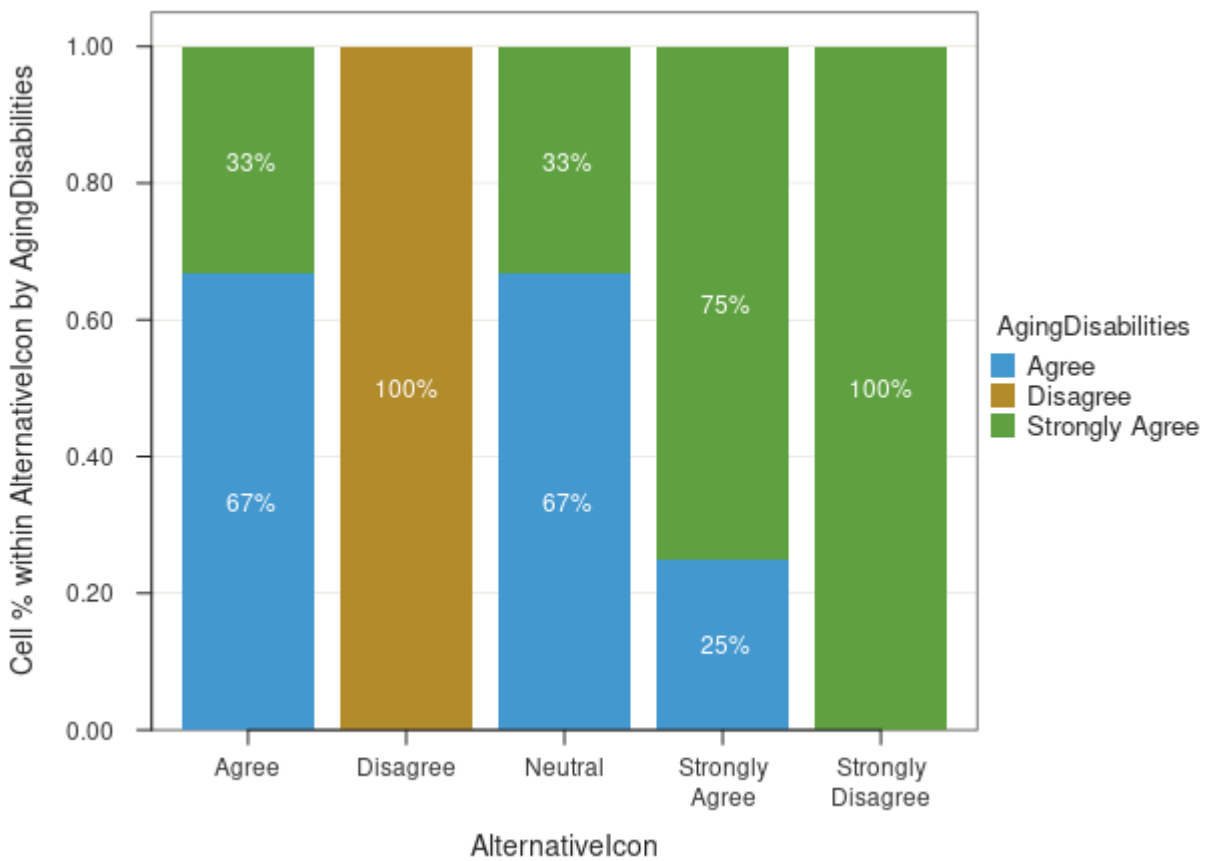
*Age*

<i>Aging Disabilities</i>	0-17years	18-37years	38-57years	58years & Above	Total
<i>Agree</i>	-	60%	25%	50%	10
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	60%	30%	75%	33%	11
<i>Disagree</i>	40%	10%	-	17%	4
<i>Total (N)</i>	100% (5)	100%(10)	100%(4)	100% (6)	25

The charts and table above offer valuable information into the relationship between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon(SW<sup>2</sup>I). These demonstrate that, compared to other age groups, those between the ages of 18 and 37 were the most who perceived the stickers as contributing to the propagation of aging stereotypes. However, to know the statistical significance of the results and the relationship, we computed a chi-square test of independence. The data of the Chi-square Test: Chisq = 7.807, df = 6, p-value = 0.253. The Cramer’s value of 0.395 indicates a moderate association between age and perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I. Since the p-value (0.253) is greater than the conventional significance level (0.05), we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we admit that there is no significant correlation between the age of public transit users and their perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.

**Hypothesis 3**

Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant correlation between the need for an alternative sticker and the public transit users’ perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I; Alternate Hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>): There is significant correlation between the need for an alternative sticker and the public transit users’ perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I.



*Alternative Sticker*

<i>Aging Disabilities</i>	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<i>Agree</i>	67%	-	67%	25%	-	10
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	33%	-	33%	75%	100%	11
<i>Disagree</i>	-	100%	-	-	-	4
<i>Total (N)</i>	100% (9)	100%(4)	100%(3)	100% (8)	100% (1)	25

The charts and table above offer valuable information into the relationship between the perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I and need for an alternative sticker. These shows that most of the study participants across different gender and age ranges acknowledged the need to replace the SW<sup>2</sup>I label on public transport vehicles with an alternative sticker towards addressing the perpetuation of the aging stereotype associated with SW<sup>2</sup>I. However, to know the statistical significance of the results and the relationship, we computed a chi-square test of independence. The data of the Chi-square Test:  $\text{Chisq} = 30.114$ ,  $\text{df} = 8$ ,  $\text{p-value} = 0.000$ . The Cramer's value of 0.776 indicates a strong association between the need for an alternative sticker and the perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I. The null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis due to the strong evidence provided by the exceptionally low p-value (0.000). Therefore, we admit that there is significant correlation between public transit users' perceptions of aging from SW<sup>2</sup>I and their need for an alternative sticker.

**Relationship Between Aging Disabilities, Alternative Sticker and SW<sup>2</sup>I Sticker.**

	Alternative Sticker		Total (n)	SW <sup>2</sup> I Sticker		
	Agree	Disagree		No	Yes	Total
<b>Aging Disabilities</b>						
Agree	100%	50%	10	50%	87%	10
Disagree	-	50%	11	50%	13%	11
Total (N)	100% (17)	100% (8)	25	100% (2)	100% (23)	25

The table above shows the relationship between the recoded variables of the perception of aging and disabilities stereotype from the SW<sup>2</sup>I Sticker (*Aging Disabilities*), the need for an alternative Sticker (*Alternative Sticker*) and the SW<sup>2</sup>I Sticker itself. Most respondents who support the replacement of the SW<sup>2</sup>I Sticker with an alternative sticker, as it reinforces the notion that aging invariably results in disability, also confirmed their notices of the SW<sup>2</sup>I Sticker on SEPTA transit vehicles.

**5.3 Literary and Film Discourse**

**5.3.1 "The Panic of Growing Older"**

The panic of growing older spreads fluttering wings from year to year	At thirty a sudden throb of pain. Laboratory tests have nothing to show	Copybook bisected with red ink and failures nothing to show the world	But science gives hope of twice three score and ten. Hope is not a grain of sand.
At twenty stilled by hope of gigantic success time and exploration	Legs cribbed in domesticity allow no sudden leaps at the moon now	Three children perhaps the world expects it of you. No specialist's effort there.	Inner satisfaction dwindles in sharp blades of expectation. From now on the world has you.

In his poem "*The Panic of Growing Older*," Peters (1967) explores the physical limitations that accompany the process of aging. Peters portrays the gradual decline of physical abilities and the related feelings of anxiety and restriction that come with becoming older through the utilization of vivid imagery and introspective language. The author establishes an atmosphere of uneasiness and worry from the very beginning with the opening line of the poem, "The panic of growing older spreads fluttering wings from year to year." The term "panic" evokes notions of intense fear and unease, whilst the depiction of "fluttering wings" portrays a sense of nervousness and unpredictability. Aligned with the notion of social construction of reality, this introduction adeptly depicts the speaker's emotional state as they confront the reality of aging.

Peters portrays life throughout many stages and the challenges that accompany it as the poem progresses. At twenty years old, life is brimming with vitality and eagerness to conquer the world, striving for immense achievement while also delving into their own sense of self. However, by the age of thirty, this expectation is destroyed by a sudden and intense pain. Experiencing frustration and confusion while dealing with medical difficulties is a regular occurrence, and the concept of "laboratory tests" that yield no results only exacerbates these feelings. The subsequent text delves more into the concept of physical disability. Peter (1967) describes the legs as being "cribbed in domesticity," which conveys a sense of confinement and being restrained. Disregard the act of making impulsive and unrealistic attempts; it indicates a lack of ability to maintain the energy and autonomy of one's youth. As life grows more aware of its own limitations arising from aging, this image vividly depicts the physical constraints that come with aging.

The poem speaks to the issue of societal constraints that individuals encounter as they age. The phrase "copybook bisected with red ink and failures" refers to a feeling of sadness and the burden of disappointment that arises from not meeting one's expectations. The poem acknowledges that having three children is a common occurrence but emphasizes that it is not seen as a noteworthy accomplishment. This exacerbates the poem's shortcomings by illustrating society's prioritization of professional achievement over individual well-being. Peters (1967) offers a glimmer of optimism despite the portrayal of physical decline and societal limitations. Science has provided the potential for extending human life beyond the typical lifespan of seventy years. This demonstrates that there is optimism for an extended lifespan despite physical limitations. Maintain your optimism and find solace in the concept of a more promising future; the line "Hope is not a mere grain of sand" encapsulates this sentiment. The speaker reflects on the waning enjoyment and heightened demands that come with becoming older, as expressed in the final words of the poem. The metaphorical "blades of expectation" might be likened to sharp razors that deeply penetrate the inner being and gradually erode one's sense of joy. The recognition of one's place in the world gives rise to a sense of obligation and the imperative to confront the challenges of aging with poise and fortitude.

### 5.3.2 "The Father"



With Anthony's dementia as its central theme, Zeller's (2020) film explores the truth of aging and cognitive deterioration in detail. One can better grasp Anthony's battles with mental illness owing to the film's narrative format. Just like Anthony's disorganized thinking, the story's deliberate use of fragmentation creates an uncomfortable and confusing environment. By putting the audience in Anthony's shoes, the film skillfully depicts the feelings of confusion and helplessness brought on by dementia. The film shows how aging affects one's cognitive abilities by showing Anthony's mental decline. His distorted view of reality stems, in part, from his dementia, which is getting worse, and from his inability to distinguish between different eras and locations. This portrayal emphasizes the reality that those dealing with mental health issues could experience a loss of independence and sense of self as they age.

Anthony and his daughter Anne already have a strained relationship, and the challenges of aging and dealing with mental illness only make things worse. Anthony forgets important details of their past together and cannot place Anne, which strains their relationship. Here we can see the potential emotional toll that dementia can take on those closest to the patient as well as others who are just passing through their lives. "The Father" examines the social effects of mental illness and aging. The film uses Anthony's story to address the many misunderstandings and societal stigmas associated with dementia. The story of Anne's struggles in caring for her elderly father highlights the need for programs that assist caregivers and older adults dealing with mental health issues. Hopkins convincingly portrays the helplessness, bewilderment, and annoyance felt by a man coping with dementia. This portrayal of the character enriches the film's examination of the emotional and psychological effects of aging. However, while this narrative may be effective for the knowledge about the perils of dementia, the use of an aged actor for this character may subtly drive the perception that aging leads to mental decline.

## VI. Discussion of Findings

Although the study's findings from the survey may be subject to debate due to its small sample size, this research method was employed to provide a perspective that can possibly guide future studies with larger sample sizes in this regard. The use of Stickers-With-Wheelchair Icons on public transit systems, intended to prioritize seats for older adults, seems innocuous at first glance. However, recent research has indicated that these ostensibly innocuous symbols might, in fact, perpetuate detrimental beliefs pertaining to the aging process and disability. Consistent with other studies (Hersch, 2013; Applewhite, 2019), this finding despite the limited sample size indicates that passengers implicitly link aging with impairment when they encounter these symbols.

Hence, the wheelchair icon, a component of the disability logos, inadvertently communicates in the regards, the notion that physical limitations are an unavoidable aspect of aging and this misrepresentation of aging, and disabilities goes beyond the portrayals on public transit, filtering into films. Gravagne's (2012) research reveals

that films often depict older adults as frail, dependent, and alone. The issue of how films portray the elderly as vulnerable and disabled has several dimensions, hence reflecting wider cultural biases and prejudices towards this demographic. This style of representation is commonly employed in drama, comedy, and even science fiction. According to Miller et al. (2004), several films perpetuate ageism and prejudice by repeating unfavorable stereotypes, despite attempts by other films to challenge them. Movies intensify ageism, which is a form of bias and unfair treatment rooted in an individual's age, by propagating the stereotype of older people as vulnerable, delicate, and disabled. This can manifest in several ways, such as societal indifference towards the needs and contributions of the elderly, bias against them in healthcare and the workplace, and biases based on age (De Falco, 2010). Moreover, it is worth noting that older individuals may encounter internalized ageism and a decline in their sense of self-value due to these preconceived notions.

Wohlmann (2014) argues that the dread of aging is subtly strengthened by the idealization of youth and vitality in poetry. Gerascophobia, an intense fear that extends beyond mere unease and becomes a matter of societal significance, arises from the collective impact of these literary and visual representations. The lines "*I have measured out my life with coffee spoons*" and "*I grow old... I grow old... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled*" in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as analyzed by Brown (2018) depicts an elderly protagonist grappling with feelings of inadequacy and physical frailty. The presentation of aging as a period of weakness and decline may potentially foster Gerascophobia by maintaining the notion that old life is characterized by loss and deterioration. The impact of these lyrical depictions extends beyond the realm of poetry, influencing societal perspectives and attitudes towards the elderly and the aging population.

## VII. Conclusion

The widely held belief that our mental and physical capacities always decline with aging is cast into an extent of doubt by this study. A fresh account questioning this stereotype has developed out of the researcher's interactions with the elderly in different contexts and their personal experiences. It is commonly believed that as we become older, our performance naturally declines, possibly, these people often show incredible tenacity and vitality to the contrary. Accordingly, this study's results provide more evidence that the media portrays more that aging does necessarily cause cognitive and physical declines. While this study argues with this notion, it here demonstrates that healthy eating and appropriate medical interventions as provided by geriatrics may possibly help older people deal with or even avoid these problems. The core provisions of geriatric care include a comprehensive assessment of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of health in older adults. Key components of geriatric care also involve addressing medication management, fall prevention, nutrition, mobility, and cognitive function.

However, while some individuals may retain their cognitive and physical abilities well into old life, others may not. Howbeit, the media should avoid making broad generalizations about the inevitability of decline in old age. This is a stereotype. The society can do a better job of creating an inclusive and empowered space for older people if it eliminates the myth that being older automatically means having physical or cognitive impairments. In line with its findings, this study suggests that the prioritization of seats for elderly individuals using the Stickers-With-Wheelchair-Icon (SW<sup>2</sup>I) on public transits, etc. should be substituted with a more distinctive logo that does not imply that physical difficulties are an inherent aspect of aging, with the aim of further reducing the perpetuation of this misguided belief.

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