



# Caravan

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE REFRAMING AGING INITIATIVE

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Welcome to the latest edition of *Caravan*. This bi-monthly newsletter shares information, ideas, and inspiration to help our fellow travelers on our journey to improve the public's understanding of what aging means and the contributions older people bring to society.



## News + Articles

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### Caravan Readers Split on Generation Labels

In a survey conducted in August 2021, readers of the Reframing Aging Initiative's *Caravan* newsletter split right down the middle on whether they personally identify as members of a particular generation, such as the baby boomers or millennials. However, when asked if they feel the generation labels have value in helping better define and understand people born in those categories, readers participating voted "No" by a 3-2 margin.

The thoughtful and often nuanced comments we received from about 70 of the 115 survey respondents shine some light on the differences between the way some answered the two questions. The survey was prompted by an opinion piece titled [Generation labels mean nothing. It's time to retire them.](#), written by Philip N. Cohen, a sociology professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, that was published in the *Washington Post*.

Here are just two representative comments we received from readers:

*Generation labels have moved from a positive way to identify self and others to a negative framework that lays blame, stereotypes, and creates fissures in the fabric of our communities.*

*While I agree that generation labels may overgeneralize people, I think these categories can help provide sociological context to groups of people like other social labels.*

[Read the full article](#) on our survey, along with the [comments we received](#).

**RAI Founding Member NCOA and Google Partner to Remove Ageism in Advertising**

[Read our Q&A](#) with [Ramsey Alwin](#), president and CEO of the [National Council on Aging](#) (NCOA), about how the organization recently partnered with Google to create a set of inclusive marketing resources designed to [eliminate ageism in advertising](#). NCOA is a member of the Leaders

**ncoa**  
national council on aging

of Aging Organizations (LAO), which collaborated to create the [Reframing Aging Initiative](#).

Alwin discusses the harm caused by ageism in advertising and how Reframing Aging principles helped guide NCOA's approach to the [inclusive marketing toolkit](#).

"The most valuable takeaway from Reframing Aging is that we need a long-term approach to furthering societal changes by reframing distorted perceptions of aging and acknowledging the contributions that older adults make to society," Alwin says. "Using this as the lens for all advertising, depictions, and portrayals of older adults is very helpful in eliminating ageist stereotypes and understanding that this is a marathon, not a sprint." [Read the full article](#) on NCOA's partnership with Google.

In related news, a [recent article](#) in Harvard Business Review found, "A study of more than 1,000 online images posted on sites with at least one million followers found widespread evidence of age stereotypes."

### **Reframing Aging Facilitator Kicks off 'Aging in America: Justice for All?' Series**

Margaret Franckhauser, BSN, MS, MPH, Director of Aging Services at John Snow, Inc. and a trained Reframing Aging Initiative facilitator, will be the keynote speaker for the first webinar in the University of New Hampshire Center for the Humanities' 2021–22 Saul O Sidore Memorial Lecture Series, "[Aging in America: Justice for All?](#)" The session led by Franckhauser, titled "Aging In America: We Are All In This Together," will take place on **Oct. 6, 2021, 3:30-5 p.m. Eastern**. The session will set the context of aging in the United States by framing changing demographics, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized groups, and the role we all play in shaping our own future as aging adults. [Register now](#).

The six-part online series will explore changing demographics in the U.S. and how long-standing age-related biases in our society affect our health and well-being with the aim to broaden our understanding and awareness of ageism as it intersects with racism, gender, sexuality, and class. It also celebrates the diversity of older adults and how attention to aging and disability can innovate and improve how we design, inhabit, and grow more sustainable communities.



### **ICYMI: Use These Free 'Age-Positive' Icons to Replace Stereotypical Symbols of Aging**

In our May issue, we spotlighted a cool resource from the Centre for Ageing Better in the UK that could help your reframing aging presentations: a series of [10 age-positive icons](#) that are free for public use. They were designed to replace the limited and stereotypical selection of icons and symbols commonly used to depict aging and older people in public life. [Download the icons](#).

## **What We're Reading**

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**Don't Call Me Sweetheart: Ageism and Sexism in Health Care**

This *Ms. Magazine* article does a great job calling out the all-too-frequent intersection of ageism and sexism. Infantilizing language is common in the health care industry— emblematic of a larger issue in how the U.S. treats older adults, and particularly older women. [Read the full article.](#)

### 3 Ways That Negative Stereotypes About Aging Become Reality

Research shows that negative stereotypes about aging can do damage to older people by impacting their own self-perceptions, making them more likely to see themselves as useless or in decline, which can in turn impact their health, according to an article in *Psychology Today*. [Read the full article.](#)

### Ageism Through the Centuries

Researcher Reuben Ng has co-authored two studies in the past year analyzing 210 years in newspapers, magazines, and fiction and nonfiction books. In the most recent, published in *The Gerontologist* in July, Ng and co-author Nicole Indran concluded: “Given the frequent portrayal of old age as a period associated with many ills, we advocate for aging to be reframed in a manner that emphasizes the important roles of older adults and the tremendous value they add to society.” [Read more.](#)

In a study published in *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, Ng and co-author Weizhong J. Lim found that the diminishing status of older adults, loss of warmth, loss of competence, social ostracism, and the medicalization of aging contributed to the increasing negativity of aging narratives over 21 decades. To test whether ageism is more related to demographics or culture, Ng and Lim studied the synonyms aged, elderly, and old people and, using collocates, developed an ageism score for 20 countries. Controlling for demographics, economics, and cultural dimensions they found: “Demographics is only one side of the ageism coin, and the cultural side is equally, if not more important.” [Read more.](#)

These beliefs about aging are revealed in the research conducted by the Reframing Aging Initiative on cultural models which showed that the public looks at older people as “other,” and that frailty, dependence, and decline are believed to be inevitable. Another important element of the initiative points to the fact that words do matter, and because communication is fundamental to culture, the content of our messaging makes a difference in how people understand their lives and experiences.

## Resources

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### Words Matter: A Podcast with Patricia D’Antonio

Patricia D’Antonio, Vice President of Policy and Professional Affairs at The Gerontological Society of America and Project Director of the Reframing Aging Initiative, was the guest on a special two-part episode of the podcast *This Is Getting Old: Moving Towards an Age-Friendly World*. In Part One of the episode titled “Aging: Words Matter,” D’Antonio talks with host Melissa Batchelor about what the Reframing Aging Initiative is and offers

### Reframing Tip

The #FreeBritney movement has led to a wider discussion about conservatorship and risks of financial abuse among older people. Here are three reminders for advocates and communicators about the most effective ways to frame elder abuse and neglect:

- Make it about **justice**: talk about how we should strive to build systems that honor everyone’s

ways to reframe our language when talking about and thinking about aging. In Part Two, she suggests ways to tell a new story about aging. Both episodes are available on the Reframing Aging Initiative's [Multimedia page](#).

agency and autonomy no matter their age or ability status.

- Talk about the **collective**—social and economic—costs of any form of elder abuse.
- Draw attention to the importance of **policy-level solutions**.



The [Reframing Aging Initiative](#) is led by [The Gerontological Society of America \(GSA\)](#) on behalf of the [Leaders of Aging Organizations](#) and is currently funded by [Archstone Foundation](#), [The John A. Hartford Foundation](#), [RRF Foundation for Aging](#), and [The SCAN Foundation](#), with additional support from [Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation](#), [New Hampshire Endowment for Health](#), [NextFifty Initiative](#), [Rose Community Foundation](#), [San Antonio Area Foundation](#), and [Tufts Health Plan Foundation](#).

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