

THE OLD AGE IN POLISH AND AMERICAN SERIES

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ABSTRACT

The educational and socialization role of the media is not the latest novelty, however there are niches that have not been developed yet. Realizing the opinion-forming role of the mass media, which may be reflected in social behaviours, the authors of this article will analyse the content of chosen media products. The image of elderly people presented by the most popular Polish and American series will be examined. The research aims to find whether *Desperate Housewives* and *Colours of happiness* (original title: *Barwy szczęścia*) adjust the image of old age to the social-demographic situation, which is constantly changing in the majority of countries. Does the colossus – television promote stereotypes which make age discrimination morally approved – or just the opposite – a well thought out image, shaping the recognition and respect for people in their “third age”?

Key words: old age, stereotype, ageism, mass media, series.

Nowadays, significant changes resulting from society ageing can be observed. They are caused by such factors as the growth of life expectancy and the decrease in the frequency of births (Janiszewska-Rain, 2005, p. 593). According to Ewa Kasperek-Golimowska (2008), in developed countries, the elderly (people above the age of 60) constitute more than 20% of the whole society. In Poland, their percentage amounts to 16% (p. 31). According to the forecasts of [Polish] Central Statistical Office, in 2025 seniors will outnumber the young (the underage) (Straś-Romanowska, 2000, p. 263). What is more, it is predicted that in 2050, in many countries, senior citizens will constitute up to 35% of the population (Kasperek-Golimowska, 2008, p. 31). In recent years, by reason of demographic changes, the issue of ageing and old age has become subject of interest to various interdisciplinary studies (Bugajska, 2012, p. 13; Błachnio, 2002, p. 14; Pikuła, 2011, p. 101). Nevertheless, Beata Bugajska (2012) claims that there is still too little attention devoted to old age and ways of eliminating problems which seniors have to struggle with, as for a country in which demographic ageing of the society is so clearly observed (p. 8).

Although senior citizens appear in mass media more and more often, the way they are portrayed does not reflect reality. Yet, television serves as a model – it provides viewers with a general, acceptable image of elderly people. Showing

them as eccentric, stubborn, funny, stupid, active, respected, influential, strong or sexy, it shapes either affection or contempt for representatives of this group (Bell, 1992, cited in Nelson, 2003, p. 225). Consequently, the way of presenting old age in the media has social consequences outside the small screen.

When it comes to the definition of "old age", a peculiar chaos may be observed in the reference books. According to Antonii Kępiński (1983), this notion is impossible to define, because life itself is hardly possible to characterize (p. 159). To put it simply, ageing can be defined as individual, "natural, irreversible process of organ changes which accompanies the passage of time" (Kropińska, Trap, & Wiczorowska-Tobis, 2009, p. 51). For the purposes of this work an extended definition, proposed by Agata Kowgier (2010), will be used. As the author suggests, "old age means (...) a stage of human life, in which unfavourable changes connected with debility and lowered psychophysical efficiency are accompanied by changes in social rank, material status, professional activity and family situation, which may influence one's personality, lifestyle and the quality of life" (p. 23).

PORTRAIT OF AN ELDERLY MAN

The beginning of old age is usually determined by a number of years. Nevertheless, there is no universal, commonly recognized periodization of this time (Nowicka, 2008, p. 18). As the end of old age is relatively easy to determine, because it is marked by death, there is no agreement on the beginning of this period (Straś-Romanowska, 2000, p. 264). For the majority of gerontologists, the period between the ages of 60-65 is regarded as the beginning of the late adulthood (Stuart-Hamilton, 2000, p. 19). It appears extremely important to emphasize the great internal diversity of this group. Therefore, the period of old age is often divided into sub-periods, although there is no consentaneous stand on this issue in the scientific community. In accordance with the postulates of the World Health Organization (WHO) it is possible to distinguish: middle age (45-59), older age (60-75), old-age (75-90) and ripe old age (above 90), also called longevity (Kasperek-Golimowska, 2008, p. 31). In spite of the fact that chronological age classification has an indisputable advantage, which is the easiness of its application, ageing is too complex a phenomenon to become a part of strict guidelines (Vigué, & Villalobos, 2007, p. 8). Chronological age is arbitrary and not very specific. The use of a precise number would give falsely objective significance of this issue. Consequently, a holistic approach to the ageing process, including changes on the biological, psychological and social level, seems to be essential.

Theories of ageing and old age. In developmental psychology there are numerous coexisting concepts explaining the ageing processes of human beings, which may be divided into two groups: theories concentrating on the biological aetiology of this process and theories analysing its psychological and social conditioning (Steuden, 2011, pp. 32-33). Due to the specificity of this article, the latter theory will be broadly examined.

The idea of activity introduced by Robert J. Havighurst is one of the psychosocial concepts devoted to elderly people (1972; 1953, cited in: Stelcer, 2009). The

author claims that people in their entire life course (in all of the six phases) must perform certain developmental tasks in order to get satisfaction and welfare in his or her old age. It is highlighted that maintaining one's activeness and fulfilling specified values is essential in middle age. Thus, lowering efficiency of elderly people should be delayed, so that one can take an active part in social life as long as possible (pp. 10-15; pp. 10-31, cited in: pp. 11-12). This theory assumes that the elderly are productive and active people (Pikuła, 2011, p. 206) who sustain existing values and patterns and compensate the lost social roles with the new actions (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2010, p. 56).

Disengagement theory formulated by Newell E. Cumming (1960, cited in: Stelcer, 2009) is the next view concerned with ageing. It assumes an apogee of the functioning of a human being in their middle age, preceded by growth and followed by gradual withdrawal from social activity and currently performed roles for the sake of turning inwards. Supporters of this approach claim that achieving success in the last period of life is connected with approval of the inevitability of withdrawal from social life (pp. 23-24, cited in: p. 12).

Lars Tornstam (1997, cited in: Stelcer, 2009) formulated gerotranscendence theory claiming that old age is the time of growth of importance of transcendence in the life of human beings, that is, moving away from the external environment for the sake of individual internal world. In this theory, the existence of "constant spiritual growth of maturity and wisdom" is assumed, and gerotranscendence is "the last stage of the natural development directed at reaching maturity and wisdom" (pp. 55-63, quoted in: pp. 12-13).

On the other hand, the notion of Erik Erikson presents ageing as "integral part of life space". According to the researcher it should be analyzed with regard to the context of one's entire existence – of their successes and failures. It is the time of existence summary. According to E. Erikson's claim, an older person is in the stage of integrity, in which he or she should accept their own past and the way in which it was experienced, proceed from concentration on oneself to the concentration on transcendence, as well as get rid of the fear of death and accept its inevitability (Sherman, 1981, cited in: Halicki, 2010, p. 15). While taking stock of one's own life, the reminiscence natural for this developmental stage (concept of reminiscence by Robert N. Butler) seems to be helpful; it is the "frequent recalling of facts and events from the past" which activate reflections and are the source of other experiences (Butler, 1963; Dubas, 2000, cited in: Halicki, 2010, pp. 15-16).

In the concepts mentioned hereinabove, it is easy to notice the significance of wisdom and autoreflectiveness in the positive experience of old age and solving developmental crises connected with it. Traditional identification of the seigniorial age with increased experience, stores of knowledge and abilities of distancing oneself from trivial problems of the present time, is confirmed by scientific theories.

Biological and psychological changes resulting from the ageing process. Human body, during the ontogenesis, undergoes continuous transformations. As we already emphasized, ageing is "a resultant of various processes". (Helms, & Tur-

ner, 1999, p. 10). In the context of old age, physiological regress is underlined, since it causes lower productivity and efficiency (Blachnio, 2002, p. 15). In this period anabolic processes are dominated by catabolic ones. A human being undergoes gradual decline in physical condition caused by a fall in immunity and adaptability to new conditions, and an increase in susceptibility to stress factors (Steuden, 2011, p. 32). In consequence, it leads to the impairment of organs and systems which is revealed by greater susceptibility to illnesses (Szarota, 2004, p. 23, cited in: Mielczarek, 2010, pp. 16-17). However, this process is strongly individualized. A lot of elderly people can pride in excellent shape (Mielczarek, 2010, pp. 16-17). Amid seniors it is possible to distinguish those who are self-sufficient, the partly dependent on others, and the completely dependent upon the environment (Vigué, & Villalobos, 2007, p. 254).

Amid seniors, apart from undeniable biological changes, transformations connected with personality, subjective experience, and psychological processes take place (Nowicka, 2008, p. 19). Exaggerated and even grotesque sharpening of their features occurs. A great number of people demonstrate the lack of the emotional stability. Moreover, a current ability of remembering becomes distorted. Although elderly people recall events from thirty years ago with affection, their short-term memory becomes less and less efficient. The attitude to changes of senior citizens is hardly ever optimistic. They are afraid of the unknown. In consequence, they demonstrate lower flexibility in many areas of activity (Pikuła, 2011, pp. 22-23).

Elderly people's attitude to themselves. Old age of other people can be seen primarily through losses, rather than profits. It is connected with the fear of illnesses, fall in activity, loss of beauty, and worsening financial situation. However, one's own old age is judged positively. The oldest people examined by Jerzy Halicki (2010) expressed contentment concerned with the fact that they have lived to a great age. They claimed that they accepted the fact of ageing, but, on the other hand, they were pleased that they did not look their age. Although elderly people consider their medical condition mainly as average because of various ailments, they understand it as the natural state of affairs (pp. 232-234).

Elderly people's attitude to the real world. Elderly people complain about the young's animosity to devote their time to conversation. They feel uncomfortable when they are forced to ask strangers for help. Some of the elderly find it frustrating to ask for assistance even close members of their families (Halicki, 2010, p. 301).

Surrounding's attitude to elderly people. Old age is seen through the numerous stereotypes which distort the image of elderly people (Kowgier, 2010, p. 68). In consequence it contributes to the stigmatization of seniors. It strengthens and justifies ageism (Tobias-Adamczyk, 2007, p. 37) – "negative stereotyped social attitudes towards older persons". It is visible in the ways in which institutions and individuals treat elderly people, as well as in the media, language, jokes and the like (Janiszewska-Rain, 2005, p. 612). Senior citizens are treated in the more evil, unfair, demeaning way. Their needs are not met sufficiently, because they are regarded as less useful than energetic youths. In contrast to the other groups they

have a hampered access to power, income, health, education and prestige (Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, & Dzięgielewska, 2006, pp. 216-217).

In Poland, according to studies by Ewa Miszczak, typical elderly person is: decrepit, poor, lonely and dependent (Miszczak, 2006, pp. 305-312 cited in: Pawlina, 2011, p. 141). Following the research done by D. E. Schmidt and S. M. Boland, it may be stated that in American society the following stereotypes concerning old age are current: "model grandfather, wise man, liberal father of the nation, weak, defenceless, lonely man, nosey neighbour, discouraged, tramp, nasty person and miser" (Tokay, 2000, p. 24, quoted in: Pawlina, 2011, p. 141).

It is claimed that although elderly people have greater knowledge and more experience, their thinking is definitely slower than the one of young persons (Stuart-Hamilton, 2000, p. 44). They are believed to be feckless and unable to work. Even though they require permanent help and care, they seclude themselves from family and friends (Pawłowska, & Jundziłł, 2006, p. 42). They are demanding, Neanderthals, touchy about the condition of their health (Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, & Dzięgielewska, 2006, p. 218). According to the universal view they are marked by greater susceptibility to stress – it is difficult for them to take control over it. Moreover, their ability to deal with problems is worse (Denmark, 1999, after: Mielczarek, 2010, p. 23). Elderly people are supposed to be naive, backwards, deprived of a reason of life. They are heavy burden not only for their families, but also for the society (Nelson, 2003, p. 242). It is generally believed that in the course of time, life satisfaction is reduced, which leads to concentrating on the past (Frąckowiak, & Straś-Romanowska, 2008, p. 33).

In spite of many negative features, it is believed, that seniors are cheerful, polite, influential, clever, trustworthy, have political power and a considerable freedom of action. They make an effort to keep the fleeting youth (Palmore, 1990, cited in: Kołodziej, 2008, p. 65). Therefore, it is absurd to believe they have reduced desires concerning, for instance, sexual needs. The majority of pensioners still lead an active life. The age, in contrast to predominant opinions, did not turn them into asexual beings (Mielczarek, 2010, p. 171).

For Donald Helms and Jeffrey Turner (1999) the discriminating attitude was developed in the period of socialization (p. 528). From the research of Sylwia Kropińska et.al. (Kropińska, Trap, & Wieczorowska-Tobis, 2009) we can get to know that percentage of discriminated elderly people in Poland, as well as in many other countries is considerable. With no doubt, it is caused by the cult of youth propagated in the past years by mass media (Kropińska, Trap, & Wieczorowska-Tobis, 2009, p. 59).

Functioning of elderly people in different roles and contexts. Being a spouse is one of the roles performed by elderly people. As J. Halicki states, the research shows that men talk about their wives with affection and approval much more often than women about their husbands. Even though women are a bit less contented with their marriages, in general, both sexes feel satisfaction (Halicki, 2010, p. 229).

The elderly act also as friends, acquaintances, although the social network is diminished in this time as a result of such factors as retirement. Establishing new

acquaintances is for elderly people less frequent. Nevertheless, they are particularly concerned about social relations they already have (Halicki, 2010, p. 300).

On the threshold the spiritual sphere is especially important for people. Being members of a community, practising a particular religion, people are provided with support and sense of security, which raises the quality of seniors' lives (Halicki, 2010, pp. 231-232).

TV SERIES AS ROLE MODELS AND EDUCATIONAL MEANS

From the very beginning, TV series¹ have enjoyed unremitting popularity both in Poland and America. Many researchers looked for grounds for such great interest in this new phenomenon of pop-culture. Moreover, they took into consideration the phenomenon of seriality as a general issue (e.g. Lewicki, 2011).

Attractiveness of series is often considered through their resemblance to everyday life. Emotions and problems of fictional characters play compensating roles – experiencing them through the identification with characters presented on screen makes up for shortcomings (Skrzypczak, 1995, p. 491). That is why series have become an acceptable substitute for everyday life (Melosik, 2003, p. 77 cited in: Mazurek-Lipka, 2012, p. 145), the contemporary “bible for poor”, which can successfully satisfy the need of narration (Skrzypczak, 1995, p. 490). In series the main role is played by dialogue – very often the set and environment are the same for many episodes, so that the surrounding is not as important as ongoing talks: “Characters in series condensate, talk platitudes, ‘let the steam out’” (Szkudlarek, 1999, p. 93, quoted in: Zierkiewicz, & Anioł, 2012, p. 147). Problems mentioned in series concern both universal issues and current problems, provoking public debate, hence series “can serve as a model – teach how to live in the modern world. This type of socialization influence (modelling) not only informs viewers about the existence of a certain social problem, but also gives a certain pattern of behavior for people who currently face it” (Pater, 2002, p. 174). That is why series can be called “pro-social” – they present important issues of social life which were so far considered taboo (Godzic, 2004, p. 39). They can be regarded as a “stylistic training ground” – the place where sensitive, unfavorable topics are discussed (Lewicki, 2011, p. 34). “Pro-social activity” of series is usually limited and very often only touches and indicates the problem – in reality the scenes are very conservative, conventional, maintaining the cultural *status quo* (Kisielevska, 2006, p. 320).

Even though some researchers perceive the educational role of series as belonging to the age of paleo-television (Skrzypczak, 1995, p. 491), it is not possible to omit the fact, that in current times “the world of television shapes objective reality rather than reflects it. Media are superior to objective reality. Therefore, it is a situation where television’s vision of reality has stronger influence on the social world and creates it more than ever before” (Bogunia-Borowska, 2012, p. 309). Therefore, “the educational potential of series should be widely understood – not only as bringing up a particular system of values, giving the useful (lively – useful) information and drawing up the

¹ The first American series were produced in 1912 (Skrzypczak, 1998, p. 230), and in Poland in 1965 (Banaszkiewicz-Zygmunt, 2000, p. 198).

model of social role, but also as 'implementation' of specific ways of a narrative and, as a result the experience the world" (Zierkiewicz, & Anioł, 2012, p. 149).

OLD AGE IN POP CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA - CURRENT RESEARCH

The problem of presenting old age in pop cultural texts is not a new issue – many publications have discussed that subject in series, adverts, movies, the press, as well as photography. According to Małgorzata Król (2006) "The elderly are portrayed in the traditional way. A role of consumers is assigned to them – they are perceived as receivers of insurance or different medications increasing the vitality (...), experts, advisers and also as grandmothers and grandfathers" (p. 27; Podsiadła, 2009, p. 219; Łyszkowska, & Sojka, 2005, p. 184-186; Wysocka, 2005, p. 191; Garncarek, 2005, p. 201-204; Chmielewska-Łuczak, 2002, p. 114-116). In the media old age is also underrepresented – it is happening in spite of the appreciable increase in the participation of the elderly in the demographic structures of societies: in Poland in the years 1988 – 2002 the population of people above 65 increased by 31.9% (Sobczak, 2011, p. 32), and in the USA in the years 1950 – 2009 the rate of retired citizens grew from 8.1 up to 12.8% (Shrestha, & Heisler, 2011, p. 13). The presence of the elderly in the real world and their growing number is not transferred into the world of the small screen – fewer than 2% of characters of TV series and movies broadcast in the prime-time are people above the age of 65 (Butler, 2006, p. 12). According to Edyta Łyszkowska and Agnieszka Sojka (2005) the natural old age does not have any chances to appear in the media (p. 187). Dominating nowadays cult of youth treats old age as unnatural phenomenon, effect of negligence or illness (Zierkiewicz, 2005, pp. 227-230). Therefore "old age was removed from collective imagination. Being out of keeping with fantastic axioms of present time, flabby bodies can only scare in nursery homes. In the world of mass media, young, preferably naked and supple body rules" (Czaja, 1994, p. 74 quoted in: Ratkowska, 2006, p. 139). That is way, the elderly are not the best characters to occur in contemporary pop culture texts (compare Podgórski, 2009, p. 159). Currently, in the public sphere, old age is usually "improved" – older people are presented as active, socially engaged and healthy (Robbins, 2005, p. 232). It is easy to notice that in mass media old age is very often discriminated, mocked and caricatured. This is not a new phenomenon – ancient Greeks parodied indispositions of the senior age. Those issues which were perceived as inappropriate and unsuitable to elderly played special roles, e.g. all signs of still active sexuality, and desire for being attractive by taking care of the body shape and clothes (outfit). They were also repeated in the following ages (Beauvoir, 2011). Elderly people in feature films and series are portrayed as "pushing, malicious and very possessive" (Garncarek, 2005, p. 202) or "beastly" characters, venting their frustration on others (Wysocka, 2005, p. 190). In the youth magazines "older women (...) are stupid, sclerotic, blind, deaf, decrepit, weak, malicious, beastly, old-fashioned, uninformed. They have no interests and do not take extra activities (...). They do not have dreams or

plans, it seems that they also have no emotions, it is not difficult to ridicule and neglect them" (Łysak, 2005, p. 217). It is an important aspect that older women show up more rarely than older men in films or series and usually do not play the leading parts (Garncarek, 2005, p. 200). Older men are introduced through the prism of the prestigious competition which they performed before, in contrast to older women, who are presented as caring grandmothers, minders and guardians of the home life (Podsiadła, 2009, pp. 219-220).

The problem of the constantly increasing population of elderly people in high-developed societies will certainly not be possible to ignore, oversight or omit in the future. With no doubt, the popular culture has a substantial role to play in that subject matter: further treatment of the old age as undesirable and wrong must be replaced and give a room to gradual introduction "into the space of postmodernist reality, demanding respect" (Podsiadła, 2009, p. 129).

CRITICAL IMAGE ANALYSIS OF OLD AGE IN POLISH AND AMERICAN TV SERIES

Making an attempt to analyse chosen TV series, we settled them in a critical paradigm, in accordance with the assumption that pop-cultural texts examined by us contain a hidden form inaccessible to the viewers. Taking into consideration the fact that series shape attitudes, serve as models, bring important social issues up, provide models of solutions and ways of understanding reality, we wished to discover in what ways media products chosen by us create the image of old age, and thereby – participate in creating a perception of it. The aim of our investigations was the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the current image of old age found in series. The study areas of conducted analysis concentrated around the following questions:

- In what kind of roles and in what context are elderly people presented?
- What is the nature of the plot in which the old people occur?
- What is the attitude of elderly people to themselves, other people and the world?
- What is the attitude of other characters of series to seniors?
- How often are the old people shown in series?

There were three main criteria which were chosen by us to select the programs to analyze: time of emission (both "historical" as well as airtime), type, and popularity. Due to the nature of the issue we decided to choose dramas², where as an indicator of popularity we picked the number of their audience. The series had to be up-to-date, showed within last few years and showed in the so-called prime-time, that is "presented to the audience in best air time: (...), between 8.00 p. m.

² As Taylor and Willis notice (2006), "at least kinds are genres, clear borders of them are never determined" (p. 62). A similar ambiguity appeared in the American production chosen by us "Desperate Housewife" – the series is described simultaneously as a comedy of manners and drama. However, further quoted authors notice that "to assign a media text to particular kind is based on the presence of number of recognized elements" (p. 62). In "Desperate housewives" numerous family problems are brought up – partnership, parental, education, associated with the local environment, with remaining.

and 11 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. and 6 p.m.” (Bonikowska, & Leska, 2009, p. 184). Considering all criteria, we chose American series “*Desperate housewives*” and Polish “*Colors of happiness*”³.

Characteristics of chosen series. “*Colours of happiness*”⁴ has been aired from 2007 in TVP2. Currently the series is broadcast on weekdays at 8.15 p.m. Episodes last about 25 minutes on average. Ilona Łepkowska is a leading scriptwriter and a producer of series, she is also author of scripts of the most popular Polish series, so such as “*The L for Love*” and “*For better and for worse*”. The plot of the series is concentrating around many trends, out of which most important are the fates history of the family of Gordons, Zwoleński, Jakubowski, Rybiński and Jeleń. Ratings of these series are in average for about 5 million viewers (Najpopularniejsze w TV, 2013; Seriale we wrześniu 2012 – wyniki oglądalności seriali – M jak MIŁOŚĆ ponad 7 MLN widzów, 2012; Wawrzyn, 2012). For the purposes of our study we have made the analysis of 35 episodes of the series.

“*Desperate housewives*”⁵ is the series of the authorship of the March Cherry, produced and broadcast by the station ABC, being one of the three largest TV stations in the USA, next to NBC and CBS (Inderjit, 2009, p. 199). The series was shown between years: 2004 – 2012, and its ratings fluctuated at that time from almost 22 to 11 million viewers (Oglądalność seriali w USA na jesień 26gru10, 2010; The Most Watched TV Shows, Season 2011-2012 [US Broadcast Nets.], 2012; *Desperate Housewives na czele*, 2006). The plot of the series is concentrating on the lives of the residents of the Wisteria Lane, located in a small town – Fairview. The main characters are Susan Mayer, Lynnete Scavo, Bree van De Kamp, and Gabrielle Solis – the group of close friends sharing common problems, joys, sorrows, and secrets. One episode of series lasts about 45 minutes. We analysed 23 episodes.

³ Although this series didn't comply with the requirements to the end of the popularity (was the second most willingly watched drama in Poland) we decided on its choice, because of the amount of literature already publicized devoted to the placed on the top of popularity series “*L for Love*”. It was analysed in terms of models of the fatherhood (Sosnowski, 2007), the strategy of the addressing and the role of seniors families (Kisiełowska, 2006), the image of an older women (Wysocka, 2005), of women's forms in the gerontological context (Mitula, 2006). The series was also analysed by Łaciak (2006).

⁴ The all information about series was taken from <http://test.barwyszczescia.tvp.pl/>, the official series website, date of access: 25.06.2013.

⁵ All the information about the series was taken from an <http://www.filmweb.pl/Gotowe.Na.Wszystko>, date of access: 26.02.2013.

Table 1. Characteristics of chosen series.

HERO	PHYSICAL APPEARANCE 1. physicality 2. clothes, additions	PERFORMED ROLES AND THE CONTEXT (including spotting the figure by the spectator)	ATTITUDE TO ONESELF	ATTITUDE TO THE OTHERS	ATTITUDE TO THE OTHER HEROES
1. „Older woman“ without a name	1. - visibly overweight - short hair, neat hairstyle 2. - jewellery (earrings) - light make up (coloured lips) - casual clothing, covering the body; purple, loose blouse without neckline, long sleeves; black tracksuit pants reaching the knees	- the guardian of order, social principles and the beliefs concerning proper child-raising methods; opposed to education methods of the mother - role of self-appointed expert; gives advice despite no one asked for it; gives opinion about one of the mothers - role of the old lady; gives cookies to the children - disagreeable - straight forward behaviour - abiding by law - grotesque	- self-righteous - believes in the rightness of her own views	- aggressive, lordly (belligerent attitude); by force isolates children - children to stay away from their own mother, screams, runs following the fleeing family - appraisingly (rashly) - grants „advice“ despite not being asked for it - from the position of the authority, of an expert - neighbours are being exploited for the care of her animal - mistrusts their competence in proper care of the cat	- disrespect; children are pushing and shoving an older woman who is falling down on the lawn, mother doesn't react, supports her children, strengthens their attitude towards elderly people - lack of help, when it is needed: an older woman is falling down, but the mother and her children remain indifferent to it - regarded asexual: during conversation about the burglary neighbours ironically are giving their opinion about the sexuality of the heroine
2. Alberta Frome	1. - short (shoulder length), brown hair, greyish, wrinkles 2. - jewellery (bracelet), watch, no makeup, glasses on a chain - clothes: loose shirt with a collar and a kitchen apron	- traveller - neighbour - friend - cat owner - burglary victim	- finds herself attractive, thinks that men can like her	- helpful - accommodating (in spite of anxieties is lending the car to the neighbour) - she doesn't respect the property of the neighbours (is stealing the newspaper from in front of the door of the neighbour)	- regarded asexual: neighbours are laughing when the heroine is confiding in them her anxieties that someone peeped at her during the bath
3. Ida Greenberg	1. - short, grey hair, wrinkles on the forehead 2. - no makeup, glasses - eccentric, old - fashioned clothes; intensive colours, big patterns (i.e. pink sweater with a cherry motif; long, loose, flowery dress)	- the object of neighbours' jokes - neighbour - the driver and the owner of an old car - active participant in the neighbourly community (participates in the search of a missing resident) - irresponsible, infantile			

<p>4. Juanita Solis</p>	<p>1. - a bit overweight - short, blond dyed hair - a little wrinkles</p> <p>2. - jewellery (cross on a chain, earrings) - make up - glittery handbag - carefully dressed: elegant blouses, skirts, jackets, blouse with a lot of glittery elements, high heels, peep toes</p>	<p>- Gabriellé's (the main character) mother in law - mother of Carlos (supporting plan character) - cheated, beaten wife - truly engaged in soap operas - older lady role: knitting, sitting in a rocking chair - guardian and defender of family: says that family is the most important thing in life and makes the life sensible, thinks that the family should not avoid revealing problems: is looking after the daughter-in-law so that she isn't unfaithful to her husband as well as is conducting an investigation on her affair, lies to the son that his father ran away to a lover (and wasn't killed) to protect him, in an oblique way says that she killed the husband, when the one raised the hand on her 4-year old son - an adviser in practical matters: is advising the son among others how to care for the faithfulness of the wife - compulsive gambler („shark of cards") - woman believing in her own premonitions - patient - specific, being clear-headed - elegant</p>	<p>- she believes her intuition and premonitions - she is convinced of her own arguments - she justifies her own immoral actions (lying to him, the manslaughter of the husband) with the good of the son - she thinks that she knows best, what he will buy, that for her the son will be happy (knows the recipe for the happiness of the son) - she considers herself a good mother - revealing to the son the truth about the betrayal of the wife, regards it as an extremely important mission</p>	<p>- attitude to the son: • loves him very much • treats him as the reason of her life: she doesn't let him show the weakness- cry, feel sorry for himself (she is hitting him in the face, when he confides in the mother telling her the suspicions concerning the affair of the wife and starts crying) - attitude to the daughter-in-law: controls her, believes that the son married below his position, runs at war with her - she thinks that she should support family members despite everything - she is taking an active part in the marriage of her son: persuaded the son to a prenuptial agreement, chose the music for his wedding, decided the colour of his house - she judges women who buy new things themselves (including her daughter-in-law) as persons having too much free time</p>	<p>- attitude of the daughter-in-law to the heroine: for her the surprise arrival is treated to as „invasion", isn't liked, treated as the enemy, thinks that the mother-in-law often gets mixed up, runs at war with her, feels relief after her death - attitude of the son to the heroine: the mother is for him the authority, subordinated to the mother, a figure of the mother is idealize, thinks that mum can visit his house when she wants to, is confiding in her, is an important person very much in his life, worries about her, and her compulsive gambling, after her death is organising a lavish funeral in spite of the difficult financial situation - attitude of Andrew (the juvenile of the neighbour who knocked her down with his car and escaped from the place of the accident): shifts the blame on to the woman behind the accident - she was inattentive, ran into the street, claims that for</p>
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<p>5. Morty Flickman</p>	<p>1. - excess weight - grey hair with the bald patch at the front of head - wrinkles</p> <p>2. - clothes: neat, shirts and sweaters done up</p>	<p>- proposing fiancé for Sophie Bremmer-Flickman - husband (the fourth husband of Sophie Bremmer-Flickman, mother of Susan Delfino- the main character) - widower (after Dolores) - stepfather of Susan Delfino - drunk man: proposes to Sophie at night under the influence of alcohol - owner of restaurant bringing in a profit (professional context) - the driver and the owner of a new car - pragmatic: gave an engagement ring to the woman after his dead wife, claiming that its maximum value, rather than history are important - adviser: is advising Susan on her emotional connection</p>	<p>- he perceives himself as an enterprising and resourceful person - first of all he is a businessman, only later a partner - he thinks that he has satisfactory intimate life</p>	<p>- he regards Sophie as the person who will please him - henpecked husband: when his fiancée is examining the ring, he is carrying three big bags into the car for her; wobbling - with concern he refers to Susan, asking her about her problems - he has positive relationship with Susan</p>	<p>her living isn't already so significant, because woman „has already lived hers” - attitude of Gabrielle's lover: disregarding, with expressed disrespect - attitude of other neighbours: they react with indifference to her death - participants in the funeral are only spectators - they don't feel sorrow because of the death of the woman - treated with understanding: even though he is coming at night not announced, under the influence of alcohol he is allowed to stay at the housewife home - desire for proposing is surprising for Susan (the daughter of his chosen one) who is trying to brush him off lying that the mother is not home - treated with concern and with help by Susan: Susan is helping him to sit down, to kneel down at the marriage proposal etc. - regarded as a good and a mild-mannered man (by Susan)</p>
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6. Noah Taylor	<p>1. - grey, short hair - numerous wrinkles</p> <p>2. - watch - clothes- muted colours: grey T-shirt of the polo type, grey trousers, loose flesh- coloured jacket</p>	<p>- father of Deirdre (a dead drug addict) and of Kendra - role of an elderly gentleman for whom children are irritating - dying person (terminally ill, has a brain tumour) - rich person - believing, praying person: is praying for the soul of the daughter - specific, ruthless</p>	<p>- regards himself as a person who has a little time left (terminally ill)</p>	<p>- searches for the guilty of the death of the daughter, wishes his death - treats people as objects, as means of - finding the murderer of the daughter(Mike) or upright obstacle in the road to this destination (Susan)</p>	<p>- spotted as the person having no sexual needs (Susan) - Susan is sympathizing with him in relation to hysterical character of his partner (Susan's mother) - treated a little bit like an object, stressing financial benefits resulting from getting married to him (by Sophie): the woman demands the replacement of an engagement ring, more expensive and new, repeatedly portrayed, a scenes showing the admiration of the woman of the new ring, given to her by the character - Sophie soon after the parting with him is making overtures to other men, although she says that she got over the relationship - Sophie is aggressive towards him (she is beating him, biting, trying to kick)</p> <p>- criticised by the daughter for unceasing seeking of the murderer of her sister - Mike is sympathizing with him for loss of the child</p>
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<p>7. Older marriage</p>	<p>1. man: grey moustache, brown hair, senile skin changes woman: grey hair</p> <p>2. man: on a wheelchair, connected to oxygen bottled, covered with a blanket, squared shirt woman: scarf on the neck, clothes in grey colours</p>	<p>- spouses - woman - carer of her husband - man - patient (context of illness)</p>			<p>- their situation arouses fear in outside observers about their own future (the vision of illness and the need for the care of the ill spouse is terrifying and „making them sick“) and „the wife looks after the more ailing husband</p>
<p>8. Tom's father</p>	<p>1. - obese - red-blonde hair (dyed) - physically in good shape</p> <p>2. - glasses - clothes: bright shirt with a collar, suit, tie</p>	<p>- father (of Tom, supporting character) - grandfather (three grandchildren) - father-in-law (of Lynette-heroin character) - husband cheating on his wife: caught by the daughter-in-law, in her house, in an intimate situation with the lover - factless</p>	<p>- he doesn't have a guilty conscience because of numerous marital infidelities - he thinks that his life is only his matter - he is identifying with the role of the grandfather: takes the grandson down from the roof</p>	<p>- stereotyped attempt at sex (girls are timid, however boys cannot show weakness) - he is avoiding the need to excuse himself to the daughter-in-law - others don't have the right to judge his acts - he doesn't love his wife - he is attached to grandsons and the son - he apologises to the daughter-in-law for his inappropriate behaviour</p>	<p>- the son is impressed by sexual conquests of the father - the son is justifying keeping the father - daughter-in-law (Lynette) is disgusted and ashamed with his behaviour which she is judging as severely immoral: is throws his out of the house, but under the influence of the request of the husband she changes her mind - according to the daughter-in-law, the father-in-law is discriminating women, displaying sexism - liked grandfather: grandsons are running to say hello to him after his arrival, are cuddling up him, are pleased with his visit</p>

9. Karen McClusky	<p>1. - slightly overweight - blond-grey hair, neglected hairstyle - make-up is missing - visible wrinkles on the entire face</p> <p>2. - glasses - jewellery (ring) - watch - careless, loose clothes: trousers from the corduroy, colour sweater</p>	<p>- mother of boy deceased in childhood: picture of him in the frame is kept on the fireplace - unpopular, disagreeable neighbour - patient of the hospital - customer of the pharmacy - ailing - driver of a car - lonely - with a difficult financial situation - traveller (was on the sightseeing tour in Costa Rica) - straightforward</p>	<p>- she confesses clearly defined values: one should apologise personally, nobody loves like a mother, one should let children do everything - self-ironic - she is afraid of death - consciously creates her disagreeable image</p>	<p>- appraising - malicious: she runs a neighbour's over on purpose since didn't take it from the street as requested - grateful for the shown help - Lynette is giving an original lamp from Tiffany - she is able to forgive</p>	<p>- children of the neighbour: they are robbing her, and then apologise for it; they are listening when she talks to them - Lynette treats her at first as the biggest enemy, is towards her malicious: throws her out of the flat, throws an egg into her car - she orders sons personally to apologise to her for the theft of her possessions - assigns to her attributes of the old age: dementia, incomplete intellectual efficiency (by Lynette): - the neighbour is feeling responsible and obliged to help her - after all he is starting tolerating the older neighbour</p>
10. Pastor Sykes	<p>1. - overweight - grey hair</p> <p>2. - suit</p>	<p>- guardian of righteousness, moralizer - confessor - listener - kind - understanding</p>	<p>- he thinks that he knows the will of God - he knows that he is a person who can be trusted because he wouldn't break the seal of confession</p>	<p>- he believes that there is goodness in people and the possibility of internal transformation - direct alert to others - he respects the beliefs of the people he talks to - empathic - a readiness for the aid is expressing - he is sympathizing with Bree</p>	<p>- Andrew appreciates his will of help, but doesn't think he needs it - the boy is showing the disrespect the clergyman - is throwing the Bible at him - Bree is afraid that the priest won't be trying at all costs to help her son - the woman is impressed by a wonderful service of the pastor</p>

HERO	PHYSICAL APPEARANCE 1. physicality 2. clothes, additions	PERFORMED ROLES AND THE CONTEXT (including spotting the figure by the spectator)	ATTITUDE TO ONESELF	ATTITUDE TO THE OTHERS	ATTITUDE TO THE OTHER HEROES
1. Teresa Struzik	1. - faint excess weight - dyed, carefully arranged blonde hair 2. - loose sweaters and blouses in lively colours, skirts to the ground - make-up - visible jewellery	- wife, mum, mother-in-law, grandmother - for housewife - female expert - dressmaker - adviser - comforter - for intermediary of marital conflicts of her daughter - female expert on love cases for her friend	- she is convinced of the wealth of her own experience and the ability	- she cares about the happiness of the daughter, is stopping in her defence and is caring about her - really involved in the marriage of the daughter - she shows a lively interest in fates of her grandsons - prejudiced against to the son-in-law, repeatedly she humiliates him, although sometimes will melt at his side - protective, - she issues decisive judgements - men are in her opinion full of internal conflicts and need women to untie them	- daughter: she counts on advice of the mother, but only in the situation, when alone about she doesn't ask, otherwise attempts are being, get back from the help as the „meddling“ - son-in-law: turning over to the mother-in-law with respects
2. Fryderyk Struzik	1. - short, grey hair - moustache 2. - shirts and trousers in muted colours (grey, brown)	- husband, father, father-in-law, grandfather - the adviser and the expert in matrimonial matters and education for his daughter and the son-in-law - good and patient listener - gardener	- he regards himself as the expert on the family life - amicable husband	- he gives the daughter and the son-in-law advice trying in addition to cause the impression „not-imposing himself“ - he respects the husband of his daughter, regards him as a good father - recognizes a right of his granddaughter to free choice of studies	- the daughter and the son-in-law respect him, often turn to him for advice

<p>3. Stefan Górka</p>	<p>1. - tall and slim - distinct, deep wrinkles on the entire face - short hair 2. - shirts and trousers in muted colours</p>	<p>- husband - engaged and understanding father - good and empathetic listener - neighbour - employee</p>	<p>- sure about his decisions - convinced of the close, good relation with a daughter</p>	<p>- attitude to the wife: he makes sure that the wife does not interfere with daughter's life, some information from his daughters' life he keeps for himself, he criticizes his wife's behaviour towards the daughter - attitude to the daughter: he shows affection for the daughter, he is interested in her life, talking to her a lot, he worries about her, he is understanding, almost uncritical, he defends the good name of the daughter, he is proud of the girl, he is pleased with her successes, he believes in her, he supports her - attitude to the former partner of the daughter: he doesn't accept him: he is aggressive towards him both psychically (he beats him up) and verbally - attitude to neighbours: he cares about the good maintenance of the relation with neighbours</p>	<p>- daughter: trusts the father, she is grateful to him for shown help and assistance - wife: she thinks that the husband is an excellent father and a good person</p>
<p>4. Mariola, Tadeusz Barczyk</p>	<p>1. - woman: black, curly shoulder-length hair - man: thin, brown hair, grey moustache 2. woman: elegant clothes, jewellery man: elegant clothes - jacket, tie, cravat</p>	<p>woman: grandmother, wife, mother-in-law man: grandfather, husband, father-in-law</p>		<p>- they don't accept the father of their granddaughter - once they tried to blot him out from her memory - they want the man to leave the girl in peace - they think that he is trying to take her away from them - they threaten him</p>	<p>- granddaughter: she lies to grandparents, in secret is meeting with her father - son-in-law (Zenon), he has great grudges against them, he doesn't respect spouses, he thinks that they don't have a conscience and a decency: the man isn't accepting their proceedings, he thinks that they treat his daughter wrong</p>

<p>5. H a l i n a Marczak</p>	<p>1. - short, dyed, carefully arranged blonde hair - soft make-up</p> <p>2. - elegant, neat clothes exactly covering the body (she is wearing the polo neck sweater when everyone stayed are dressed in T-shirts with the short sleeve) - jewellery</p>	<p>- the widow, the mother, the mother-in-law, the grandmother and the grandmother - friend - confidante of secrets of Julia's granddaughter - defendant of the granddaughter, proceedings of the girl before her parents justify - emphatic comforter - adviser - practical wisdoms teller</p>	<p>- she is convinced of the influence she has on her son, conscious, that son take her person into account very much</p>	<p>- shows a lack of understanding for problems of the older granddaughter - attitude to the younger granddaughter (Julia): she is caring for the right way of the trophism of the granddaughter, she worries about the girl, protects her and supports her - she is proud of her - she believes in her - attitude to the son: she lies to him in order to help Julia: she advise the son in what way he should treat the daughter, she shows the son and his wife committing by them mistakes, she is warns the son what consequences of his proceedings can be - criticises a ruthlessness and education methods of parents of the granddaughter</p>	<p>- Julia: the granddaughter has an absolute confidence to the woman, she feels great love for her, she is with her very close - son: the woman is an indisputable authority for the son, the man is complying with a request for her in order to please her, in the way of bringing Julia up by parents however the excessive interference of the woman is annoying the man- household members are treating the woman with the respect</p>
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Source: Own elaborate.

SUMMARY

Character of the elderly in pop-cultural texts is based on a large dose of conservativeness. Although television offers controversial programmes such as: game shows (e.g. *"The moment of truth"*), talk shows (e.g. *"Jerry Springer"*) and series (e.g. *"Californication"* or *"The Tudors"*), which present direct or even vulgar erotic scenes (Ziębiński, 2010), mass media remain very careful in creating image of elderly people.

The quantitative analysis of the threads concerning old age indicates that only about 8% of the entire time was devoted to the elderly in Polish – and nearly 11% – in American series.

In described episodes the image of old age is cohesive and coherent with its stereotyped perception. Scriptwriters of both series (though, particularly of Polish series) put gigantic emphasis on showing the "third age" in the context of existing or non-existing family. So, older women are primarily grandmothers or loving and caring mothers (sometimes not being able to reconcile with an early death of their children). Men, on the other hand, as may be expected, play the roles of grandfathers, alternatively – of fathers strongly attached to their daughters. They are more often than older women portrayed in the context of the pursued occupation and potential partner relations. Only 2 out of 9 women characters in American series and none out of three in Polish series, are introduced in the context of the pursued occupation. This proportion looks totally different in the case of male forms – 7 out of 9 heroes of *"Desperate Housewives"* and 2 out of 4 males of *"Colours of happiness"* are professionally active people.

It looks that the authors of analysed series transferred past opinions about characteristics and rights of the adult men and women on elderly people. It is possible to notice a greater approval of the American society of the intimacy of people in their "third age". In *"Colours of happiness"* subject of sexualities of both sex is being omitted. All signs of the sensitivity have an unusually subtle dimension. In *"Desperate Housewives"* sex is not a taboo subject. Male heroes talk directly about their preferences and needs. However, as shown in analysed series the sexual activity of men above 65 is a cause of admiration – opposite to older women, who encounter a lack of understanding or... understanding pitiable smile. Elderly ladies are treated as asexual and devoid of their own sexuality. However a great majority of ladies were described as stylish – tastefully, elegantly dressed, wearing jewellery and heavy make-up. So they are required to take care of their appearance and keep their own femininity, denying the right simultaneously using it. Moreover, they are more often portrayed in environment "appropriate" for grandmothers – in the kitchen, in the course of preparing meals, frequently for the entire, multigenerational family.

Old age was also shown through the prism of illness – analysed heroes are patients of hospitals, customers of pharmacies, persons in need.

"Old age as a wisdom" is also a frequent motif of old age. Older women and men perform the roles of advisors, experts of life, marriage, education, neighbourhood, friendship; they are presented as experienced and competent people., giving relevant tips and advice, making appropriate and right assessment. Particular-

ly in Polish series, being ready to share practical wisdom and support in difficult situations co-occurs with the lack of any needs: older women and men do not talk about their own problems and desires, do not have expectations or even special requirements – on the other hand, they do not hesitate to help their children and grandchildren, unselfishly. It can be stated that older people appearing in “*Colours of happiness*” live in series only through and for their families.

The image of elderly people in texts of popular culture went through the real evolution – from the antiquity, when they were portrayed in the pejorative and ridiculous way (Bell, 1992 cited in: Nelson, 2003, p. 225) to contemporary times, with dominating “family” and good-natured image.

However, old age presented by the media, is still not a real old age – it appears disproportionately rarely, and is illustrated in an “improved” and “smoothed down” form, because the media still require aesthetic products. Nevertheless, some areas of old age still remain a taboo. Taking problems raised currently by mass media into consideration, we can see they are gradually changing their audience from elite groups into egalitarian (Bogunia-Borowska, 2012, p. 43), it is possible that this way of presenting old age, formerly derided, currently idealized – will finally strike a balance and approach the everyday truth.

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