

Chapter 31

Researching Ageism through Discourse



Amanda Phelan

31.1 Introduction

The way we see the world is inevitably shaped by a number of factors such as culture, experience, language and values. Culture may be described as the customs, beliefs and values generally developed over time and experience, within a particular people or within a society. Language is one vehicle of cultural expression (Macionis and Gerber 2013). We understand the world by co-creating and co-constituting meaning and reality. The chapter begins with a brief presentation of the idea of social constructionism and ageism and then presents how one method of social construction, discourse, influences and mediates how we think, act and understand older people and how narratives can promote and privilege particular identities and consequently construct and reproduce ageism in society. Specific methodologies of discourse analysis are then introduced (Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology) to underpin the examination of data from research interviews of health care professionals (Phelan 2010), older people and their children (Ayalon 2015). Critical discourse analysis, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis, focuses on the examination of how political and social inequalities are constructed, sustained and reproduced in texts, which includes speech and written text and consequently discourse is seen as a site of power relations (Wooffitt 2005). In contrast, discursive psychology, another form of examining narrative, is concerned with a fine-grained analysis of the action orientation of language in constructing ‘reality’ (Potter 1996, 2003). Such constructions in discourse have consequences in that they legitimate public attitudes, perspectives and behaviors towards older people and can

A. Phelan (✉)

School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: amanda.phelan@ucd.ie

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contribute to policy and legislation directions (Fealy and McNamara 2009). The combination of both approaches to examining discourse enables both a review of language as a general ‘system of representation’ (Hall 2001:72) as well as how language is used within social practices which create and stabilizes versions of reality (Potter 2003).

31.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a way of seeing the world. It emanates from the field of sociology. The way we see ‘reality’ is impacted by many factors. For example, we have many taken for granted ‘truths’, such as gender, the meaning of childhood or what constitutes an older person. These truths are not neutral in the world but evolve from meanings we subscribe to and also relate to how we position those meanings. For instance, in the case of gender, we could, instead, classify humans according to height, the colour of eyes or hair, however, an accepted, dominant classification of human beings is through anatomical characteristics. So as Searle (1997) suggests, objective facts, such as gender, are only objective through human agreement. However, such understandings and meanings are fluid in the sense that they can vary over time and within cultural assumptions.

Burr (1995) argues that social constructionism involves a number of assumptions. Firstly, there is a critical approach to how we perceive the world, which should make us question the basis of ‘truth’. Secondly, understanding and knowledge are culturally and historically located. For instance, think of the idea of human rights. These are commonly accepted canons, yet historically and culturally, they vary in the context of equality of human beings. Yet, for some cultures, human rights can be socially constructed in alternative yet oppositional ways. For example, Ignatieff (2001: 102) notes that ‘Since 1945, human rights language has become a source of power and authority. Inevitably, power invites challenge. Human rights doctrine is now so powerful, but also unthinkingly imperialist in its claim to universality, that it has exposed itself to serious intellectual attack’. Thus, Ignatieff (2001:102) continues to pose the question whether this constitutes an example of ‘Western moral imperialism’, which denies alternatives such as cultures where the rights of the collective can legitimately supersede the rights of the individual. Thirdly, Burr (1995) argues that knowledge is sustained by social processes. This is particularly important in discussing ageism and discourse, as discourse constructs shared understandings and promotes ways of thinking about the world. Age is a significant cultural aspect of society (Roscigno et al. 2007) which, as a chronological phenomena, can be taken as ‘a fundamental and organising principle’ (Spedale et al. 2014:1586) which shapes the very meaning of being old (Cruikshank 2013). Thus, the way we talk about older people and how we position them discursively has consequences not only in our perception of this population group, but also in their treatment within policy (Wilisńska and Cedersund 2010), legislation, health and social care practice and older people’s subsequent experience of the world.

31.3 Ageism

The ‘discovery’ of ageism is generally attributed to Robert Butler (1969) who identified how older people were constructed in stereotypical and discriminatory ways and this phenomena can be aligned to similar prejudicial perspectives such as racism and sexism. Hockey and James (2003) argue that discourses produce particular social identities for particular age groups. In terms of older adults, ageism can be either systematic or casual and can target either individuals or groups. Although Butler (1969) identified negative aspects of ageism, proponents such as Palmore (1999) argued that ageism also had positive aspects such as older people being more reliable workers or engaged in volunteerism. However, negative aspects of ageism are generally constituted by de-individualising and devaluing the older person through particular attitudes, practices and cultures. Ageism, within a negative lens, is considered enmeshed overtly and covertly in society and promotes a perspective of older people as holding homogeneous traits which are predominantly undesirable, such as having poor health, being unattractive, being senile, dependent, unemployable and inactive, asexual, and generally inflexible (Lyons 2009).

Bytheway (1995) argues that ageism, as an ideology, promotes particular views, usually from a dominant group, which justifies the way older people can be treated. Such perspectives are supported by Rowe and Kahn (1998:12) who argue that ageism is ‘a negative view of a group divorced from reality’. The consequences of negative ageism are clear: inequality, inequity, a higher risk of maltreatment and disempowerment (Biggs et al. 1995; Minichiello et al. 2000; Phelan 2008; Malmedal et al. 2009). Indeed, Spedale et al. (2014) points to the cultural irony within the perspective that to successfully age is to appear ‘ageless’. In contrast, youthfulness is highly prized which creates a ‘culturally endemic paranoia’ of ageing (Schwaiger 2006:14) demonstrating a mind (wanting to be youthful)-body (aging body) split (Biggs 1997). Even within the ageing process, the exclusion from particular roles can be seen as age increases. For example, older parenthood (>35 years) can be considered a taboo and even harmful to a child (Wilisńska and Cedersund 2010).

Generally accepted societal norms can be identified as ageist. For instance, in employment, mandatory retirement has been argued as inherently ageist (Angus and Reeves 2006), as it implies those over a particular age are incapable of doing the job. Paradoxically, a lack of labour contribution has been seen as negative due to dependency related fiscal costs on nations (Wilisńska 2013). Moreover, ageism can be found within institutions such as health, social care, community participation and organisational practice (Spedale et al. 2014). In addition, stereotype embodiment theory suggests that older people themselves can internalise ageist assumptions and, within the context of self-fulfilling prophecies, position themselves accordingly (Minichiello et al. 2000; Calasanti 2015; Chrisler et al. 2016), through further reproducing and validating negative ageist traits. Such perspectives, also have consequences within health as older people may be excluded (or indeed self-exclude) from ameliorative treatments. However, there are some examples of older people separating themselves from the taken for granted concept of old age. In Wilisńska’s

(2013) consideration of members' experience of the University of Third Age, old age identities were rejected, yet, there was a separateness or otherness observed by the University of Third Age members (who were generally over retirement age or unemployed younger people) from older people outside this group.

Within media forms, discourse can perpetuate particular stereotypical identities for older people, for instance, within newspapers (Phelan 2009; Fealy and McNamara 2009; Wilisńska 2013; Weicht 2013; Chen 2015), television (Spedale et al. 2014; Chen 2016a, b), holiday brochures (Ylänne-McEwen 2000) and social media (Levy et al. 2014). Such public and authoritative forums are particularly influential in forming and perpetuating societal identities of older people by shaping public opinions through creating particular representations and relations (Harwood 2008, Wilisńska 2015).

31.4 Discourse Analysis in Research Related to the Topic of Ageism

Potter (2003:73) describes discourse analysis as a way of analysing how 'talk and text are used to preform actions' which enables making sense of social order (Howarth 2000) and creates identities and ideologies. In recent years, the use of discourse analysis has contributed to revealing how talk and texts construct older people in certain ways. In particular, examining discourses in old age is useful in determining how the ageing body becomes socially significant (Wilisńska 2013). In exploring 'silver market' holiday brochures using discourse analysis (Ylänne-McEwen 2000), both positive and negative identities are presented. Activities which promote youthful pursuits and adventure are advertised, but the brochures also regress to a dependency discourse where the older holidaymaker has the security of home like destinations, afternoon teas and familiar comforts (Ylänne-McEwen 2000). Similarly, Coupland (2003) points to the portrayal of old age in anti-aging advertisements, which serve to fuel a fear of aging and that the aging skin is undesirable and in need of assistance as it is in decline and in need of repair.

In relation to policy formation, Weicht (2013) used discourse analysis to examine how older people, as subjects of policy, were constructed in Austrian newspapers and how particular interventions were legitimised based on such subject positions. Although findings demonstrated positive constructions of older people in terms of being active members of society, negative images dominated in the context of a lack of voice and agency of older people within reportage. Older people were de-individualised and assumed to be vulnerable and reliant on others (generally family) to determine their lives. Moreover, older person self-determination was diminished and while achievement was acknowledged, it was constructed as a past identity. In Weicht's study, chronological age was not an identifier, rather particular older

groups with particular characteristics which were constructed as a ‘demographic time-bomb’ (Weicht 2013:190). Thus, policy was framed around dependency with care provided for older people at home with some state support. Equally, in the review of social policy documents from Poland and Sweden, Wilisńska (2013) revealed old age as being constructed as a problem of dependency related to both a lack of labor contribution (Poland) or poor health status (Sweden), both posing a financial burden on the states. Wilisńska (2013) argues that these perspectives are limiting and reductionalist.

Ageist constructions can also be located in media forms. For example, commenting on older people’s construction within Irish newspapers, Fealy et al. (2012) point to the dominance of dependency subject positions where older people are constructed as others, separate from independent younger age groups and thus marginalized. Wilisńska (2013) used a multi-data discourse analysis approach to examine welfare cultures. Newspapers in Poland were used to analyse the welfare culture and three constructions of older people were identified in relation to family, market and society. Findings pointed to acceptable and unacceptable identity locations related to age, which could also be gender aligned. Chen (2015), using a discourse analysis approach, found that Taiwanese newspapers placed older people in a position of dependency. Similarly, in an analysis of television advertisements for life insurance products using discourse analysis, Chen (2016a, b) also demonstrated how Taiwanese people over 50 years of age are positioned with findings pointing to patronizing communicative conventions which reinforced negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of old age. When Ylänne-McEwen (2000) examined how holidays were advertised with a target audience of older consumers, there was evidence of a juxtaposition of counter identities of aging. Positive accounts of ‘golden agers’ were the exception while the de-individualised older person as a receiver of resources was a more common identity (Ylänne-McEwen 2000).

31.5 Discourse Analysis

There are a number of philosophical and analytic approaches within discourse analysis. However, in this chapter, we will focus on two methods to examine discourse in research interviews: Foucauldian discourse analysis and discursive psychology. The chapter is specifically structured to demonstrate exemplars of various data types under the separate methodologies. Both methodological approaches complement each other and show how discourse works on both a macro level (Foucault) and a micro level (discursive psychology). Thus, the macro level enables a consideration of looking at how power relations in society work to construct and position older people through language and at the micro level how individuals actively construct subject positions in their interactive narratives.

31.6 Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis is an approach within critical discourse analysis. In critical discourse analysis, language becomes much more than a system of representation. As Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2) state, 'CDA [Critical discourse analysis] is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex...'. Thus, discourse has social implications and can produce, sustain and reproduce inequalities in power relations (Wodak and Fairclough 1997, Wooffitt 2005). Discourses are, therefore, a way of being in the world.

In the case of ageism, discourse has enabled the systematic stereotyping of older people and empowered perspectives which value youthfulness (Harbison 1999). Coupland and Coupland (1999) identify two ageist perspectives in relation to discourse. Firstly, ageist discourse describes the forms of talk and meaning to which an ageist perspective is applied at a local level, for example when talking, perceiving or constructing older people. Secondly, discourses of ageism refer to ageist practices related to particular consequences such as human rights breaches and the lack of opportunities afforded older people. Discourse can, therefore, produce inappropriate and derogatory ways of speaking of older people that can be discriminatory (Wilisńska 2015). As Gee (1990:143) argues:

A *Discourse* is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'.

Equally, discourse can serve to identify one as outside the socially meaningful group or deny the prospect of a socially meaningful role.

Michel Foucault developed particular understandings discourse and its operation in the legitimization of knowledge. In his numerous publications (Foucault 1975, 1989, 2002, 2003), discourse is constructed as a system of representation and knowledge. Thus, in using a Foucauldian approach as an analytic lens, ageist perspectives are seen to be produced through particular discourses related to the conditions of knowledge possibility within the context of what can be spoken of at a particular time. Accordingly, discourses produce subject positions of the older person. In this context, subject positioning means the location and identify afforded older people and as Davis and Harre (1990) note:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant with the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned (Davis and Harre 1990:46)

Subject positions then create ideologies, which are simply commonly held beliefs of older people.

There are two main components in Foucauldian discourse analysis: archaeology and genealogy. Archeology traces a topic or idea related to how it appeared within

the context of culture and history and discursive possibility at a given point of time. In the context of ageism, this means an understanding of how ageism emerged as a social product. In contrast, genealogy considers the propositions upon which the topics or ideas are founded or, in this context, how ageist stereotypes can regulate how older people are seen and treated. In this chapter, the review of narratives within the interview data from Phelan (2010) and Ayalon (2015) will predominantly draw on the latter perspective of genealogy. Genealogy enables an examination of the constitution of and relationship between discourse-knowledge-power inter-relationships in the world. Thus, powerful discourses work within a complex network of relations which produce knowledge and sanction legitimate ways of positioning older adults and consequently speaking of, seeing and treating older adults. This power relationship, which Foucault terms bio-power, permeates all aspects of life and essentially underpins the visibility of ageism in discourse and practice and the subsequent legitimisation of 'truth' about older adults. Such 'truths' are not only constructed in discourses but can be internalised by older people, who may assume the prevailing subject positions, such as being frail, dependent, asexual or less valuable to society.

Foucauldian discourse analysis, allows a focus on *discourse as constituting reality* (Hepburn 2003, Phelan 2010) and discourse is seen as constructing legitimate knowledge in the social world, which influences behaviours, practices and identity (Jäger 2001). Thus, the point is that discourse is not neutral; it follows particular conventions and functions to serve a purpose such as constructing our ideas. Discourse can establish dichotomies such as positive and negative, 'them' and 'us' or whose voice is privileged and whose voice is silenced. Importantly, discourses become agents of power, constructing 'valid' knowledge and discourse can be considered as constituting ways of social influence (Coupland and Coupland 1999). Discourse, therefore, allows us to know about the world in 'context specific frameworks for making sense of things' (Van Leeuwen 2009:144). Thus, it is of little surprise that 'truths' are established through discourse as once we speak of a topic, it becomes known and familiar and may assume a taken for granted, unchallenged stance. Consequently, age categories promote particular identities and establish power relationships between each other (Calasanti 2015).

31.7 Discursive Psychology

Although the Foucauldian perspective critically examines issues related to discourse-knowledge-power relationships, it neglects the individual active and subjective construction of narratives by people. Discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Edwards and Potter 1992, Wetherell 2001, Potter 2003) addresses this. Emerging from the fields of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, discursive psychology centres on three main principles. Firstly, discourse is action orientated; it functions to some end, such as answering a question or describing an experience. Secondly, discourse is sequentially organised, for example, asking a question

generally elicits an expected response. Thus, there are mutually understood conventions in discourse. Within this context, Edwards and Potter (1992) describe discourse being situated rhetorically, meaning that discourse is constructed to present particular valid arguments and to counteract alternative viewpoints.

Within the topic of ageist narratives, discursive psychology illuminates how apparently incoherent statements are contextually related and function in a particular way. Thus, the speaker's accountability is established through the justification, sense making and rational of the narrative, particularly related to how the speaker positions themselves or others they are referring to. Finally, in discursive psychology, discourse is both constructed and constructive. It is constructed by using tools such as words, ideas, beliefs and referential terms which build up the validity of what is being said (Wetherell 2001). Discourse is constructive in that the information given is interpreted and represents the individual in a particular way such as being neutral in the issue being discussed or demonstrating their stake and interest regarding the subject of conversation.

31.8 Using Both Methods of Discourse Analysis as Lenses into Ageist Discourse

While Foucauldian approaches allow the examination of the macro structure of discourses at a particular time and also interrogates the knowledge-power-discourse relationships, discursive psychology allows an examination of the micro processes of how an individual uses language as a social performance. In other words, while Foucault can offer a way to look at available knowledge at a particular time, discursive psychology enables a review of how individuals actively orientate discourse focusing on the individual's cognitive processes and the role of accountability and stake in speech acts (Potter 2003, Willig 2003).

This chapter section draws on published data from two studies to examine how ageism is constructed and reproduced in discourses within transcripts from semi-structured interviews (Phelan 2010, Ayalon 2015). The participants are Irish community nurses (Phelan 2010) (interviewed in 2007–2008) and Israeli older adults and their children (Ayalon 2015) (interviewed 2010–2014).

31.9 Using Foucault to Examine Discourses of Ageism

Within the context of the interviews, there is what Foucault would consider the knowing self (Besley 2005). Applying a Foucauldian lens allows us to see how the individual speaker draws on both implicit and explicit common discourses of ageism in society, while discursive psychology enables a deconstruction of how such narratives are orientated to promote the speaker's individual stake and accountability.

Foucault argues that what we speak of deductively draws on common and available and accepted macro discourses in circulation at a particular time. In a study using semi-structured interviews (Phelan 2010) with community nurses in the North East and East region of Ireland, participants constructed what their view was on older adults in Irish society, what constituted elder abuse and how they managed such cases. All community nurses constructed the older adults in society and those they cared from within negative ageist frameworks. When asked specifically about older adults in Irish society (i.e., not only those the nurses delivered care to), two participants initially commenced their narratives by stating the value of older people, however this was transient and all 18 participants drew on ageist discourses of dependency. This compares to findings in other studies where the value of older adults was attributed to past contributions (Weicht 2013). In the excerpt below, it is clear that older adults, as a population group, are constructed in a way that promotes a biomedical discourse of physical dependency and homogeneous characteristics. In addition, there is a discrete categorisation of older adults as different:

Alice:...but from 70 [years] onwards, I think hmm...they [older adults] deteriorate in health and in the general elderly population and vulnerability...

Dependency is unilaterally related to functional decline, as older people require external assistance to help them in daily life:

Ann: And then I suppose you know...inability to do things as well from themselves...what is the word I am looking for? God what's the word I'm looking for...activities of daily living...you know they [older adults] they need assistance with things in daily living.

In particular, medical dependency was related to both physical and cognitive decline and was spoken of by all participants who constructed older adults in general Irish society as being 'in need'. Drawing on the macro-discourse of ageism, risk and biomedicine, the participants all presented their narratives as undisputed truths.

Similarly in a study of continuing care retirement communities (CCRC) in Israel, Ayalon (2015) interviewed 34 dyads of older adults who had recently entered CCRC and their adult children to explore perceptions of old age and ageing. One of the prominent findings in this study was the dominance of negative views of ageing which were related to loss of function. For example, in the excerpt below, the biomedical view of decline is also apparent as the older adult's son used chronology as a basis for discontinuing driving:

Son: 'Up until now she was still driving, recently I stopped her, because her age is a little problematic'

Thus, like mandatory retirement ages, age not ability, is the standard for participation in activities.

Again, the decline of the body is continued in the nurses' discourses of older adults within their care (Phelan 2010) as the participant asserts her informed (and disciplinary powerful) opinion which promoted paternalism and denied the older person privacy and self-determination. Consequently, the subject position and identity of the older person is framed as helpless, dependent and vulnerable, again promoting a discourse of ageism:

Deirdre: I suppose in my...just cross covering in my colleagues area just last weekend, there was a lady with Alzheimer's [disease]...total nursing care who had home help and who really needed 24 hour care but the family would have left in the afternoon from 2.00–4.00 or 2.00–5.00 and left her unattended. Now she was immobile and... and that but it was the vulnerability of somebody who really required 24 hour care and the family not having the insight that really somebody should be there...

Examining the power-knowledge-discourse relationships in the excerpts demonstrates that these nurses heavily and unproblematically drew on ageist and stereotypical views of older adults. In particular, both functional and cognitive deterioration was a prominent feature of their narratives which emanated from powerful discourses of medical reductionalism related to biological decline. In essence, positive and diverse constructions of older adults in society and those who care was delivered to were predominantly absent.

Ageism was also constructed within an economic reliance of older adults who depended on old age pensions and other benefits, denying the ability to be economically productive. Thus, fiscal dependency is equated to chronological age rather than ability, denoting ageist perceptions:

Karen:...they [older people] don't have a lot of money...that their pension mightn't cover what their needs are...

Economic dependency further reinforces the older person's sense of vulnerability and denies alternative constructions of older people having sufficient funds. This can be related to the macro discourse of older adults related to pension 'burdens' within political statements as opposed to having independent means and financial stability.

Thus, age becomes a powerful justification for the limitation of an activity and is tacitly accepted through a self-internalisation of such reasoning as detailed in the older person's consideration of this. In the excerpt below, we can also see how society's social practices on driving influenced the older person. By not renewing the license, driving is prohibited as this is regulated through discourses on legislation. Furthermore, the association of age as a 'burden', is common in ageist discourses, and is also sustained by the older person. In the excerpt below, the inevitability of physical decline is not challenged by the older person, who did not pursue the possibility of amelioration of her visual deficits, and was influenced by her children's perspectives on her continued driving potential.

Older Person: 'Simply I did not renew the license. And the kids influenced me.... "If I need them," I told them, "I will be a burden on you. You will have to drive me. To take me to places"...

I also needed to go to an eye exam (to renew the driving license). I was afraid that they would tell me that I needed to do a cataract operation. I just decided to take this off my shoulders'

In addition, as detailed in the excerpt, the older person was fearful of being medically forced to withdraw from driving due to sight problems, thus, giving dominance to the medicalised view that her possible condition of cataracts which would preclude driving. Yet, the position of recovery from the treatment of cataracts was not

presented, indicating ageist self-determination; that treatment is considered not to be an option due to age or that the cataract might be a catalyst to a medicalised argument to discontinue driving based on sight and the possible identification of other health decline. Accordingly, the older person's construction of the power of medical knowledge has a direct impact on her decision to discontinue driving, which is justified by not having legal permission to do so. Consequently, such perspectives demonstrate how prevailing discourses open up or deny subject positions and identities older people can assume. As one ages, dependency on others increases as a social reliance is created in the context of transport dependency.

31.10 Using Discursive Psychology to Examine Discourses of Ageism

As discussed previously, discursive psychology is concerned with the person's indicative construction of the narrative and, in particular, how that narrative is actively and individually orientated to produce a particular 'version' of reality which accounts for self and others in terms of stake and accountability. The context of ageism can be downplayed in narratives, yet, a careful review of the text can reveal the action orientation of neutralizing contentious issues to mitigate the speaker's stake and accountability.

In Ayalon's (2015) study, when asked about the move to CCRC from home, an older resident comments on how older people are preyed upon and are positioned as vulnerable.

Older person: I think that sense of security is unstable. As you hear, they attack an elderly here and rob an elderly there. Knocked on the door, presented themselves as... I don't know who and then attacked people, I think that here (CCRC) I am protected...

A careful examination of the text reveals a more complex repertoire. The older person positions herself and 'elderly' as a vulnerable population by stating 'I think that here (CCRC) I am protected'. The attribution of 'I think' (i.e., the conditional tense) functions in a way to counteract any future unsafe experiences (i.e., in the event she was wrong in asserting being safe in the CCRC) and concedes to the possible limitation of her knowledge of being secure. For example, others might think differently of living in CCRC, so the use of the conditional tense addresses accountability in the narrative. The veracity of the narrative of vulnerability is supported through a careful description (attack and rob) which characterises such attacks as normalised. The script is also constructed to logically justify the need for protection of and safety for older adults. In the script formulation, there is also a careful juxtaposition of telling a story where the facts are not clear (As you hear...they...I don't know who), yet this is contrasted and counter positioned with a more authoritative, credible and subjective evaluation of the personal experience of safety. The way the narrative is presented also puts the older person in a positive subject position as her own accountability is seen as a responsible person who took appropriate measures

to protect herself by entering the CCRC as opposed to other older adults who choose to remain vulnerable in other settings. However, even within the narrative, it is evident that the need for protection of older adults is necessary due to vulnerability ascribed to older adults.

Equally, it can be seen that the community nurse in Phelan's (2010) study constructed abuse of older people in a particular way. When asked about why abuse might happen, the excerpt below shows an ageist framing of older adults:

Interviewer: Can you tell me what your perspective is on older people in Irish society...just in general?

Joan: Well, they are vulnerable aren't they? That's a big issue hmm...some people do it... if they are vulnerable they [perpetrators of abuse] do it because they can do it...I don't really know you see...

Yet the use of the 'aren't they?' question functions in a way to engender agreement from the listener and to counteract any impression that Joan could be wrong. There is a clear dichotomy established between vulnerable older people and powerful perpetrators ('...because they can do it'). The participant positioned the statement 'I don't' really know you see...' to attend to her own character and counter any negative impression of her perspective. This is achieved by playing down the motivation of her narrative in the context of overtly blaming the older person for being vulnerable. Thus, the implicit thrust of the text is ageist, yet, efforts are made to mask this through the use of the evaluative expression 'really', which portrayed her own character in a positive way.

Thus, even within the fine grained analysis of how people structure their version of reality, it can be seen that, although there are tacit linguistic strategies to neutralise the impact of ageist text, a critical examination of an individual's construction of their narrative reveals what the speaker is *doing* in the text and precisely how ageism is tacitly imparted through discourse.

31.11 Discussion and Conclusion

Lynam (2007:540) asks 'does discourse matter?' The answer is yes. Discourse *itself* constructs reality, producing 'valid' and legitimate knowledge and influencing behaviour (Jäger 2001). Thus, an examination of discourse is a particularly important component in understanding the complexity of ageism as a system of representation of older adults (Hall 2001) which denotes 'otherness'. This is apparent in the terms and nouns used, the imagery drawn up and defining older adults as both a separate group and as different from other groups (Fealy and McNamara 2009). Within this chapter, particular methods of critical discourse analysis have illuminated ways of deconstructing texts using multiple methodological approaches. The various text and sub-textual sources presented primarily reveal older adults as dependent, vulnerable, helpless and frail and although it is noted in each of the studies that there are counter positive ageing subject positions presented, the dominant

discourse is aligned with the stereotypical negative constructions of ageism. The objective of such deconstruction of texts is to see language as a social practice and a social performance (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Willig 2003). Language is a powerful vehicle of constructing reality and can both implicitly and explicitly establish, perpetuate and reproduce values, stereotypes and ways of seeing the world. Thus, as Fairclough and Wodak (1997) observe, there are ideological consequences which produce and reproduce inequalities, such as ageism. Such discourses can deny the construction of age as related to individual personhood and heterogeneity (Fealy and McNamara 2009). However, ideology is not the prime focus for critical discourse analysis, but rather it is the concealed and taken for granted views within discourse that are challenged (Wodak and Meyer 2009). Thus, in everyday discourse, there are power relations that exist and which appear neutral, tacit and unproblematic but promote inequalities.

Critical discourse analysis reveals particular subject positioning and identities afforded older adults and how particular discourses legitimate the dominance of populist views and ways of seeing the world. Ageism is generally concerned with power relations between societal groups and critical discourse analysis allows an interrogation of such power relations in society (Fairclough 1989). In navigating different approaches and different text representations, this chapter has provided an insight into how ageism is constructed and legitimised in relation to its condition of possibility in discourse; how an individual produces versions of reality and how newspapers mediate the social production of valid knowledge. Furthermore, discourse has consequences; it does not occur in an ideological vacuum but permeates societal attitudes, professional practice, policy and legislation and thus, is fundamental to the perpetuation of hegemonic interests.

Critical discourse analysis enables such ageist perspectives to be laid bare, which can be a self-fulfilling prophecy in older person's self-identity and in its consequential experiences for older adults in everyday life. A final question remains- Is it possible to have non-ageist discourse? Is it possible to remove age as a factor and only speak of people as individual heterogeneous human beings with an individualized personhood? The answer is yes. We see it in, for example, legislation as a criminal act. This is because a criminal act is defined as such regardless of age, in the Human Rights Declaration (UN 1948) and conversations of citizenship (Marshall 1949). Thus, the assumption of attributes of an aged population diminishes and instead discourse focuses on the individual regardless of chronology and articulates diversity rather than homogeneity. However, for this to become a reality poses a significant challenge. As Coupland (253) notes 'Ageist discourse is prevalent but discourses of ageism (and anti-ageism) are not'. Therefore, society needs to address the way discourse can often be constructed to represent older adults as stereotypical 'others', who are often associated with a homogenous biological decline. Only in recognizing this, can we be liberated from an ageist frame of reference when speaking of older adults.

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