(In)visibilities of Men and Aging in the Media: Discourses from Germany and Portugal

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Abstract. Social representations stem from wider processes of socialization within which the media perform a simultaneously reflective and co-constitutive role. Embedded in society, mainstream media discourses tend to legitimize and convey social representations in line with hegemonic ideologies. By doing so, mainstream media shed light on what are considered to be valid representations and roles and render invisible those which are not hegemonic and, hence, dismissed as less important or actively invisibilized. As European democratic societies are becoming increasingly older and gender equal, it would be expected for mainstream media to go in line with these trends, giving increasing visibility to seniors and to both women and non-hegemonic representations of what it means to be a man. This paper intends to explore whether media representations go on par with this course. To put it forward, this paper will identify how media are representing men and aging in Germany and Portugal through a quantitative content analysis of four national weekly news magazines.

Keywords: Social representations · Media representations · Masculinities · Ageism · Older men

1 Introduction

Representations used by the media are a fundamental fabric of the ideas one creates and holds about oneself, others and reality at large [1–3]. Gender and age identities are no exception to this logic. Despite entailing biological considerations, masculinities [4]

and aging [5] are socially constructed, representing models that are culturally imagined and whose evolution develops according to the different contextual settings.

Several studies show the enormous power media hold in shaping the way society percepts and understand the older people [6, 7], as well as gender norms, roles, behaviors and aspirations [8–11]. Media narratives co-constitute the construction of gender identities [12] as well as for generational identities [13, 14]. Concerning age, media promotes common societal stereotypes [15] associating old age with negative attributes including loneliness, illness and dependence [16]. In fact, "age is often used as a background variable in the construction of different audience segments and profiles" [17]. The media depiction of older people perpetuates ageism underrepresentation and negative characterization [7]. Gender-wise, both in the North and in the Global South [18], mainstream media traditionally conveys representations of masculinities that associate "being a real man" with characteristics and attitudes of dominance, power, leadership, rationality, heterosexuality, and dominating sexual performances, among others [8–11, 19–22].

However, as media simultaneously inform and reflect society [1, 2, 23] and as European societies are becoming increasingly older [24] and progressively (even at a slow pace) gender equal [25], media representations are expected to go in line with these larger societal changes. Stemming from this presupposition, this paper intends to understand how media are representing men and aging in democratic liberal societies, exploring to which representations they shed light on, which ones they dismiss or neglect as less important, and which ones are rendered invisible. In Portugal and Germany studies on media discourses and older people have not taken a gendered approach. In the rare cases where a gendered approach is used, studies are mostly focused on women [53]. It is therefore necessary to identify the media representations of older men in both countries. In societies where hegemonic masculinities are evident in media representations, this study focuses on older men with the aim of understanding whether aging is a variable that molds media depictions of men over the age of 65. As such, this paper departs from the following research question: How are older men represented in the media? To put it forward, this study analyzed four weekly news magazines in Germany and Portugal through a quantitative content analysis. In terms of aging, and according to PORDATA data [24], in 2016 19.3% of the population of the European Union was 65 years or older. Germany is the third country with the oldest population (21.1%) and the fourth country is Portugal (20.9%). First is Italy (22.2%), followed by Greece (21.4%). In terms of overall progress toward gender equality, Germany and Portugal are on par with many other European Union countries [25].

1.1 Media and Representations

Discourses and systems of representation construct the places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they find their "place of speech" in society [12]. Assuming the changing and transformative nature of society, the enunciation in media discourses has a social nature: meaning is a product of cultures and subcultures, conveyed from shared social construction [26]. The representations that are socially shared contribute to the perception of a common reality within a particular

group. Therefore, the discourses, when socially legitimated, are assumed to be a regime of truth [27].

Social representations derive from the process of socialization and are directly associated with collective identity [16], which, by definition, tends to be hegemonic. The social facts correspond to ways of acting and to representations that are external to the individual. According to Durkheim [28], society and collective consciousness are moral entities. Therefore, what people feel, think, or do is independent of their individual will and translates behavior established by society. In this perspective, social facts exercise a coercive power. It is something that exists and that remains beyond the individual. It follows that the construction of symbolic representations shared by members of social systems inhabits a universe of specific sociability [29]. This is exactly the process of forming media representations.

The media construct identities and are instruments of social legitimation [30]. Discourse emerges as a resource for power, as a way of limiting the freedom of action of the other through persuasion. Language presents itself not as a reflection of reality, but as an entity that constructs it [31]. It follows that language has the constitutive power of reality. Fairclough [32] claims that power in the media discourse refers to the idea of social construction of reality.

Discourse is the social process of making and reproducing meaning [33]. Discourses are not, in themselves, textual, but relations of power. The news does not reflect reality, but helps to constitute it as a shared social phenomenon [34]. In this perspective, the news defines, redefines, constitutes and reconstitutes permanently the social phenomena [34]. It is not in the enunciation that journalists produce discourses. It is within the discursive process itself, through multiple operations articulated by the processes of language itself, that the audience is constituted in advance [26].

1.2   Media Discourses on Men

Masculinities are socially [4] and semiotically [35] constructed, representing culturally imagined ideals. Being multiple and sometimes even contradictory, masculinities can be defined as standards of practices through which both men and women assume a position within the gender hierarchy [4]. In this context, hegemonic masculinity represents a culturally imagined ideal of what it means to be and behave as a "real man", being associated with notions of rationality, toughness, dominance, strength, power, and leadership. As Connell and Messerschmidt [4] point out, the hegemonic masculinity is normative and not necessarily statistical: it is an ideal, which creates a reference from which all men should identify themselves in a relative logic.

Traditionally, mainstream media portray men as holding personalities and behaviors in line with hegemonic understandings of what it means to be and behave as a man [8–11, 19, 21, 22]. As Silveirinha [36] summarizes, the representations on men shared by the media are social constructions embedded in the hegemonic ideology, which, in turn, perpetuates the traditional gender roles and norms. These representations are not only expressed in hyper masculinized characters like Rambo or James Bond, for example. There are other more subtle formulas which, assuming themselves as

counter-hegemonic - because conceived almost in opposition to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity - also do reproduce sexist and misogynist models. The "nerd" character in several TV series is a clear example of this[1]. On the other hand, traditional gender norms are also becoming present in mediascapes. Challenging characters in popular shows on TV, such as the Joel in Parenthood or Mitch and Cam in Modern Family, are starting to emerge in the mainstream media. Nevertheless, these choices are still exceptions to the general way media have been representing men.

In terms of effects, several studies [8–10, 18, 22] show that hegemonic representations of masculinities ends up encouraging beliefs and sexist behaviors, including blaming women when victims of sexual violence perpetrated by men [37], naturalizing violence, particularly within the context of relationships [37], tolerating sexual harassment, policing what fits into the idea of "being a man" [38]. As such, these representations contribute to the perpetuation of unequal power relations between genders [19], affecting in a harmful way girls and women, but also men and boys [39, 40].

1.3   Media Discourses on Age

Around the phenomenon of aging of the population has emerged a diversity of terminologies inducing changes in social representations and public policies on the phenomenon [41]. Consequently, in European contemporary societies, representations about aging derive from discursive (re)qualifications seeking positive terminologies [42, 43]. Nevertheless, the media continue to perpetuate images with the conceptions of gender that determine the traditional roles; also the generations are usually represented statically. The population over 65 is often represented as a homogeneous group.

In the "age of mediated visibility" [44], the multiplicity of discourses conveyed by the media create and recreate social and group identities through the proliferation of social representations that assume the hegemonic ideology [16, 42]. Historical and cultural societal matrix factors represent older people and the aging of differentiated and hieratic ways [45]. Therefore, "discourses of gender and ageing have a political character: they define relations between different groups of people, establish a power structure and play a determining role in assigning certain societal spaces to individuals" [46].

According to Ylänne [5], "representations, words and images guide our thinking of ageing. They produce metaphorical images of what ageing is like". Gerbner et al. [6] identified an underrepresentation of older people on television. As the older population tends to be invisible in societies, the media perpetuate this assumption as a normalization [47]. Colombo and Fortunati [48] considered that the mediatic experience occurs within the cultural environments of the people, an idea that is associated with the belonging of a group. In this regard, Corsten [14] coined the term "We-sense", which means that historical and social experiences, whether individual or collective, within the public or private sphere, allow identification with groups. Hence, the various generations experience social and technological changes in a perspective of coexistence. The media experiences can shape the social construction of a "generational

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[1] See "The Adorkable Misogyny of The Big Bang Theory", Pop Culture Detective Agency. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3-hOigoxHs.

identity" that derives from the media representations. The representations on the feminine and the masculine shared by the media are social constructions shared by a hegemonic ideology, which perpetuates the traditional roles [36].

2   Method

This paper aims to analyze media representations of older men in Germany and Portugal, seeking to detect visibilities and invisibilities. In order to answer the research question ("How have older men been represented in the media?"), was conducted a case study through the method of content analysis [49]. The descriptive study had a quantitative approach and was focused on four news magazines: two Portuguese ("Visão" and "Sábado") and two Germans ("Der Spiegel" and "Focus"). Assuming "news magazines are important agents in the formation of public opinion" [50], the choice of the four news magazines was derived from three factors: to be a general weekly news magazine, not to be published as newspaper supplements, and to have the highest circulation within its category ("Der Spiegel" = 840,000/week, "Focus" = 441,805/week, "Visão" = 97.306/week, "Sábado" = 54,914/week). The decision to compare magazines from Germany and Portugal focused on being the third and fourth oldest country in the European Union [24].

The corpus analysis was collected from all issues published in October 2018 (four issues per magazine). For a comparative analysis between the four news magazines, thematic sections were standardized as follows: Society, Politics, National, International, Economy, Culture, Sport, Health, Entertainment, Opinion and Obituary. The quantitative content analysis assumes the following categories of analysis: the classification of the sections, the categorization of journalistic genres and formats elaborated by Melo and Assis [51] as shown in Table 1, the headlines, and the gender of the protagonists.

Table 1. Journalist genres and format

Journalist genre	Example
Informative	Note
	News
	Report
	Interview
Opinionative	Editorial
	Comment
	Article
	Review
	Column
	Caricature
	Letter
	Chronicle

(*continued*)

Table 1. (*continued*)

Journalist genre	Example
Interpretative	Analysis
	Profile
	Survey
	Chronology
	Dossier
Diversional	Human interest history
	Color history
Utility	Indicator
	Quotation
	Script
	Service

A media genre can be considered a "content category" [52] with the following characteristics: "(a) a 'collective identity', capable of being recognized by both producers and consumers; (b) the interrelation of this identity with its explicit function (information, entertainment or related), aligning form and content; (c) the permanence of that identity through the ages, attaining to the agreed parameters, aimed at preserving cultural patterns; (d) a narrative structure or a predictable sequential order, molded by stereotypes, but incorporating a 'repertoire of variants of the basic issues'" [51]. Therefore, the analysis is focused on the media genres and their formats, the sections and the gender of the protagonist of the journalistic pieces.

Due to the specificity of the news magazines, the genres "Utility" and "Diversional" were not considered. The inclusion criteria in the analysis were journalistic texts (Informative, Opinionative and Interpretative genres) whose protagonists were older people. The total of journalistic texts of the 16 analyzed numbers is 1231 ("Visão" $n = 306$, "Sábado" $n = 241$, "Der Spiegel" $n = 349$, "Focus" $n = 335$). After analyzing all the texts, 1107 articles were excluded from the sample of analyzed issues for not meeting the inclusion criteria. The final sample consisted of 124 journalistic texts (10,1%) – 38 from the Portuguese magazines ("Visão" $n = 26$, 21% and "Sábado" $n = 12$, 9.7%) and 86 from the Germans magazines ("Der Spiegel" $n = 45$, 36.3% and "Focus" $n = 41$, 33%).

3   Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, there are differences in the journalistic genres used in the magazines of the two countries. The interpretative genre is the most common in Portugal ($n = 20$, 52,6%), whereas in Germany the informative genre predominates ($n = 50$, 58,1%). In the total sample, the informative gender predominates ($n = 59$, 47,6%).

Table 2. Journalistic genre by country

Journalistic genre	Country		Total
	Germany (n, %)	Portugal (n, %)	
Informative	**50 (58,1%)**	9 (23,7%)	**59 (47,6%)**
Interpretative	25 (29,1)	**20 (52,6)**	45 (36,3%)
Opinionative	11 (12,8%)	9 (23,7%)	20 (16,1%)
Total	86 (100%)	38 (100%)	124 (100%)

In Table 3 it is possible to verify that the analyzed texts fall into 10 different formats, and we can observe the format used by country. The "profile" format is modal in both Germany (*n* = 25, 29,1%) and Portugal (*n* = 17, 44,7%). The "analysis" and "chronicle" formats are only used in Portugal, as well as "caricature" and "reporting" are exclusive to the German magazines in our sample.

In both Germany and Portugal magazines, the journalistic pieces of the sample are not predominantly prominent (*n* = 81, 92,2% vs. *n* = 38, 100%, respectively), as show Table 4. Therefore, it is verified that invisibility in the headlines of the journalistic pieces in which protagonists are older people. The analysis showed that stories that are not highlighted also have less visibility in the pages of the news magazines, contributing to the thesis of the invisibility of the elderly in media discourses [53].

Table 3. Journalistic format by country

Journalistic format	Country		Total
	Germany (n, %)	Portugal (n, %)	
Analysis	0 (0,0%)	3 (7,9%)	3 (2,4%)
Article	4 (4,7%)	1 (2,6%)	5 (4%)
Caricature	3 (3,5%)	0 (0,0%)	3 (2,4%)
Chronicle	0 (0,0%)	6 (15,8%)	6 (4,8%)
Column	4 (4,7%)	2 (5,3%)	6 (4,8%)
Interview	12 (14%)	5 (13,2%)	17 (13,7%)
News	14 (16,3%)	3 (7,9%)	17 (13,7%)
Note	23 (26,7%)	1 (2,6%)	24 (19,4%)
Profile	**25 (29,1%)**	**17 (44,7%)**	**42 (33,9%)**
Report	1 (1,2%)	0 (0,0%)	1 (0,8%)
Total	86 (100%)	38 (100%)	124 (100%)

It is also important to note that in the headlines of the German magazines ("Der Spiegel" $n = 3$, "Focus" $n = 2$) the protagonists are men and the news pieces fit in the sections "National" ($n = 2$) and "Politics" ($n = 3$).

Table 4. Headlines by country

Headline	Country		Total
	Germany (n, %)	Portugal (n, %)	
No	**81 (94,2%)**	**38 (100%)**	**119 (96%)**
Yes	5 (5,8)	0 (0,0%)	5 (4%)
Total	86 (100%)	38 (100%)	124 (100%)

In the gender of the protagonists, there is a predominance of male in Germany and Portugal ($n = 71$, 79,1% vs. $n = 31$, 81,6% respectively), as shown in Table 5. As empirical evidence shows media representations reproduce hegemonic cultural discourses and tend, thus, to render women invisible in the media, particularly when compared to men, as several authors have demonstrated [34, 36, 54–57].

Table 5. Gender by country

Headline	Country		Total
	Germany (n, %)	Portugal (n, %)	
Female	15 (17,4%)	7 (18,4%)	22 (17,7%)
Male	**71 (82,6%)**	**31 (81,6%)**	**102 (82,3%)**
Total	86 (100%)	38 (100%)	124 (100%)

Table 6 presents the analysis between section and gender of the protagonists. The results demonstrate that crosscutting the different sections there is a numerical expression of the male protagonists constituting a clear majority in the four analyzed news magazines, with particular emphasis on "Politics", "International" and "Culture". Also, in the "Obituary" section, although there is a female presence, men predominate. Regarding the "Opinion" section, it is important to highlight the balance in the German magazines (female $n = 2$, male $n = 3$), in contrast to a greater presence of men in the Portuguese ones (female $n = 0$, male $n = 6$).

Table 6. Section and Gender of the Protagonists by country

Section	Country					
	Germany			Portugal		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Culture	5 (5,8%)	15 (17,4%)	20 (23,2%)	1 (2,6%)	4 (10,5%)	5 (13,2%)
Economics	1 (1,2%)	4 (4,7%)	5 (5,8%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)
Entertainment	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)
Health	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)
International	0 (0,0%)	**10 (11,6%)**	10 (11,6%)	0 (0,0%)	**3 (7,9%)**	3 (7,9%)
National	2 (2,3%)	9 (10,5%)	11 (12,8%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)
Obituary	5 (5,8%)	**19 (22,1%)**	24 (28%)	6 (15,8%)	**9 (23,7)**	15 (39,5%)
Opinion	2 (2,3%)	3 (3,5%)	5 (5,8%)	0 (0,0%)	6 (15,8%)	6 (15,8%)
Politics	0 (0,0%)	**11 (12,8%)**	11 (12,8%)	1 (2,6%)	**5 (13,2%)**	6 (15,8%)
Society	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	2 (5,3%)	2 (5,3%)
Sports	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	0 (0,0%)	1 (2,6%)	1 (2,6%)
Total	15 (17,4%)	71 (82,6%)	86 (100%)	8 (21,1%)	30 (79,9%)	38 (100%)

These results are intertwined with Table 5, showing that the numerical expression quadruples between men and women (Germany: female $n = 15$, male $n = 71$; Portugal: female $n = 7$, male $n = 31$). The dominance of discourses in line with the hegemonic ideology, particularly concerning issues of Politics (national and international) and Culture, are one of the results with greater prominence of this table. In the case of the German magazines, men also dominate the "National" section. In Portugal there were no journalistic pieces of "National" that had seniors as protagonists.

This study argues that media representations, even in aging democratic liberal societies, tend to underrepresent older men and, when including them on media contents, representations go in accordance with hegemonic understandings of what the older man should be and how he should behave, dismissing other - complex, multiple and overlapping - forms of being, expressing and behaving as older men.

4   Conclusion and Limitations

This paper aimed to identify visibilities and invisibilities of older men in news magazines of Germany and Portugal in order to answer the research question: "How are older men represented in the media?".

In the "age of mediated visibility" [44], the results show a invisibility of women and older adults, being older men represented in line with traditional roles assigned to "real men", such as leadership. Older people are protagonists of only 10.1% of news stories from a total of 1231 articles, which leads to the conclusion that aging and older people are not socially represented in the discourses of the analyzed news magazines. Specifically focusing on older men, these are represented in different "places of speech" [12] according to their social position, but only with significant prominence in the "Politics", "International" and "Culture" sections in both countries. As far as political

and cultural life is concerned, older men are an integral part of the hegemonic ideology. The same happens with the opinion texts and, for that very reason, with their presence itself in the media. Furthermore, it was verified that the aging of the population - which is a reality of both countries - was also rendered invisible.

The analysis also shows that the dominant journalistic genres differ in the two countries (Germany: informative genre 58,1%, Portugal: interpretative genre 52,6%). However, the journalistic format that prevails in both countries is identical and corresponds to the "Profile", which is often used in the section "Obituary".

Between visibilities and invisibilities actively produced through political and public discourses [57], the idiosyncrasy of male dominance in the two countries was verified. The results also show the invisibility of older people in the news magazines with the exception of the "Obituary" section where they have a higher presence.

Analyzed media discourses tend to reproduce the hegemonic ideology concerning age and gender. Older people are underrepresented and older men, when given the opportunity to be represented, are portrayed in line with traditional conceptions of manhood. The analyzed journalistic pieces give evidence of a mediated social construction of reality filled with stereotypes that promote the near non-existence [58] of women, non-hegemonic masculinities, or older people in the four news magazines. The power of producing absences [58] that the media holds, makes the older population almost non-existent to society. It is also important to highlight that media tend to misleadingly (re)create the image of senior people as a homogeneous group, regardless of clear differences in terms of activity, profile, health, among others. Recreating the image of the senior people as if time were of a static nature, the media continue to perpetuate the male protagonist in this almost non-existence of the older population.

The main limitations of this study are related to the quantitative approach and the analysis period. In the future we will try to analyze the same news magazines in a longitudinal study through the analysis of qualitative content, focusing on text and image.

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