



Recontextualising Ageing as a Choice

A Critical Approach to Representations of Successful Ageing

av

Lame Maatla Kenalemang-Palm

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i medie- och
kommunikationsvetenskap,
som kommer att försvaras offentligt
fredagen den 06 maj 2022 kl. 13.15,
Hörsal F, Forumhuset, Örebro universitet

Opponent: Maria Edström, docent
Institutionen för journalistik, medier och kommunikation,
Göteborgs universitet
Göteborg, Sverige

Örebro universitet
Institutionen för humaniora, utbildnings- och
samhällsvetenskap
701 82 ÖREBRO

Abstract

Lame Maatla Kenalemang-Palm (2022): *Recontextualising Ageing as a Choice: A Critical Approach to Representations of Successful Ageing*. Örebro Studies in Media and Communication 28.

This thesis examines the intersection between representations of ageing femininities, empowerment, and oppression in marketing and advertising practices, within the context of successful ageing. In the current era of population ageing, debates on gender and ageing are becoming more pronounced. Due to population ageing, there is a visible increase in representations of (successful) ageing in the media. As a result, we are experiencing an expansion in the “grey market” of anti-ageing products and services, e.g., cosmetics, mainly aimed at wealthy older women who constitute an important market segment for such. Given that the media helps form people’s ideas about ageing, there is a need to critically examine this growing market and how older women are represented and/or addressed in it. Such representations are crucial for understanding contemporary feminist discussions on the contestation between women’s empowerment and oppression. To provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, I use an intersectional feminist perspective combined with the methodology of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). This perspective highlights and deconstructs the complex ways in which power and ideology work to maintain and reinforce existing intersectional structural inequalities based on age, gender, class, and race that marginalise women. This thesis consists of three empirical studies. The findings suggest a shift from the postfeminist gaze towards a neoliberal self-objectifying gaze that closely operates alongside discourses of successful ageing. This self-objectifying gaze encourages women to actively work on and transform the ageing self through intensifying self-surveillance, self-scrutiny, and self-improvement practices. These self-transformation practices are presented as the free choices of empowered, entrepreneurial, and responsabilised subjects. Nonetheless, such choices confine women to never-ending forms of self-governance that promote the internalisation of patriarchal and capitalist ideal standards of beauty, thus reinscribing privilege and oppression.

Keywords: cosmetic advertising, grey market, intersectionality, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, neoliberalism, older women, postfeminism, successful ageing

Lame Maatla Kenalemang-Palm, Department of Media and Communication Studies. Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro, Sweden