



Up And Aging: A Critical Study Of Ageism And Resilience In Pixar's Up

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Abstract

A person cannot be and should be judged in terms of race, colour, sex, ethnicity or even age. All these stereotypes not only pose a challenge to the overall development of the society but also leave a deep psychological impact on those who experience it. Until recently, age was not being studied as a stereotype in literature or in any other field as such. The term Ageism attracted the attention of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists as well as literary critics. And thus began the study of a new kind of 'ism' in literature that we now know as Ageism. The term not only studies how age based stereotypes is reflected in literature but also explores the challenging of such stereotypes. The paper attempts to study Ageism in the animated movie **Up** produced by Pixar Animated Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The story revolves around an aged man Carl Frederickson, his dreams, his encounter with a young boy Russell and their adventures together.

Keywords: Age, Movie, Ageism, Stereotypes, Psychoanalysis.

Introduction

Our society has witnessed a number of stereotypes throughout history be it on the basis of race, colour, gender, ethnicity etc. But at the same time these discriminations have been fought off and spoken about in the literature and in modern times through films and television series. One such stereotype that has been coming up in debates is age and it has gained traction in the subsequent years and therefore researchers, advocates, and policymakers began to explore and address age-related discrimination more systematically. We often come across the phrase "Age is just a number." But this idea can be traced back to the concept of Ageism; the development of this which has contributed to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by individuals of different age groups and has led to increased efforts to combat age-based discrimination. The concept of ageism was developed by Dr. Robert Neil Butler, an American geriatrician and psychiatrist, in the late 1960s. Dr. Butler introduced the term in his 1969 book titled *Ageism: Another Form of Bigotry*. This work marked a significant contribution to the field of gerontology and brought attention to the discrimination and prejudice faced by older individuals. Dr. Butler coined the term "ageism" to describe the stereotyping, discrimination, and marginalization of people based

on their age, particularly targeting older adults. He drew parallels between ageism, racism, and sexism, framing ageism as a form of societal bias comparable to other forms of prejudice.

Ageism manifests in literature through the crafting of characters, themes, and narratives that reinforce or challenge societal biases based on age. Authors may perpetuate age-related stereotypes by creating characters who conform to conventional expectations associated with their age group, such as portraying older individuals as frail and dependent or younger ones as irresponsible and naive. Narratives may also marginalize certain age groups, reflecting societal tendencies to dismiss or overlook the experiences of specific generations. Literature can depict characters facing direct discrimination due to their age, exploring the challenges individuals encounter in various aspects of life, including employment, relationships, and access to resources. Generational conflicts within the narrative can also serve as a vehicle for exploring age-related tensions and misunderstandings, shedding light on the complexities of intergenerational relationships. Some literature may exhibit a bias toward youth-centric narratives, idealizing the experiences of younger characters while neglecting the depth and complexity of older characters. But at the same time meaningful cross-generational relationships depicted in stories can challenge ageist stereotypes, emphasizing the shared humanity that transcends age differences. Ultimately, reflecting and challenging ageist attitudes, shaping perceptions and fostering a more inclusive understanding of individuals across the age spectrum.

This paper attempts to throw light on the positive side where literature can also challenge ageism by presenting characters who defy stereotypes, leading fulfilling lives in their later years and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of aging experiences. One such example is a movie titled *Up*, an animated adventure film produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The film begins with a young Carl Fredricksen, a shy and imaginative boy, idolizing an adventurous explorer named Charles Muntz. At the 82nd Academy Awards, *Up* received nominations for Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Sound Editing; and won Best Animated Feature and Best Original Score. The Hollywood Reporter has lauded the film as "Winsome, touching and arguably the funniest Pixar effort ever, this gorgeously rendered, high-flying adventure is a tidy 90-minute distillation of all the signature touches that came before it."

Carl befriends a spirited and adventurous girl named Ellie, and the two forms a deep bond over their shared dreams of adventure and exploration. They marry and aspire to visit Paradise Falls, a remote location in South America. As life goes on, Carl and Ellie face the challenges of work, finances, and health. Despite their best efforts, they are unable to embark on their dream adventure before Ellie passes away. The story then shifts to the elderly Carl, who lives alone in his now-surrounded-by-urbanization house. He is seen as an obstacle to 'infrastructural development' by the MNC that is trying to reconstruct the place around him. But his house not only brings the stark contrast of modernity and conventionality but also is a gentle reminder of the love, the closeness and the bond that Carl and Ellie shared in

particular and our society, in general. At this point one can presume that the movie reflects the idea of ageism but at the same time challenges it. Carl initially embodies the stereotype of the elderly person resistant to change. This resistance is often associated with ageist beliefs that older individuals are set in their ways and unwilling to embrace new experiences. Carl's determination to stay in his house despite societal pressures reflects the common perception that older individuals may face challenges adapting to new environments and are often expected to conform to conventional expectations.

But Carl's refusal to vacate his house can be interpreted as a challenge to the notion that older individuals are inherently dependent. Instead, he strives to maintain his independence and agency, showing that older people are capable of making decisions for them. Facing eviction, Carl decides to fulfill his promise to Ellie and turn their house into a makeshift airship by attaching thousands of helium balloons to it. By turning his house into a makeshift airship and embarking on a journey to South America, Carl challenges the stereotype that older individuals are not adventurous or capable of pursuing excitement and exploration. With the house floating in the air, Carl inadvertently brings along an unexpected passenger, Russell, a young Wilderness Explorer scout who was trying to earn his final merit badge for assisting the elderly. The mismatched duo embarks on an accidental adventure to South America.

Their journey takes them to a mysterious and exotic land, encountering talking dogs equipped with collars that translate their thoughts into speech. These dogs, led by the charismatic but villainous Charles Muntz, were once his loyal companions. Muntz, having been ostracized by society, is obsessed with capturing a rare bird, believed to be the key to restoring his reputation. As Carl and Russell navigate the dangers of the wilderness, they discover that the rare bird Muntz seeks is, in fact, a large and colorful creature who Russell names Kevin. They also encounter Dug, a friendly dog with a collar, who is also looking for the same creature for Muntz but is kind and unlike the other dogs with the collar. Muntz, believing that Carl's discovery of Kevin threatens his legacy, turns against them. The group forms an unlikely bond as they face various challenges and threats. Carl, as an elderly man, grapples with physical challenges such as fatigue, mobility issues, and the demanding journey to South America. These challenges initially align with ageist stereotypes that portray older individuals as physically frail and incapable. He also deals with profound grief and loneliness following the loss of his wife, Ellie. His emotional struggles challenge ageism by portraying the complex emotional lives of older individuals, countering stereotypes that might oversimplify their emotional experiences. Russell, being a young boy, faces stereotyping associated with his age, including assumptions of inexperience and excessive energy. These stereotypes are challenged as Russell proves his resilience, resourcefulness, and capability throughout the journey. Russell's motivation to assist Carl in earning a merit badge for assisting the elderly reflects societal expectations and stereotypes regarding youth engaging with older individuals. However, as the story progresses, Russell's genuine care for

Carl challenges the notion that intergenerational relationships are purely transactional. As Carl and Russell confront challenges together, their relationship evolves into a partnership that challenges ageist assumptions. It emphasizes that older and younger individuals can have interdependent relationships, breaking the stereotype of one-sided dependencies. Both characters experience personal growth and learning throughout the adventure. Carl learns to let go of the past, embrace change, and appreciate the value of human connections. Russell learns about perseverance, empathy, and the importance of relationships with older individuals. These narratives challenge stereotypes of stagnation in older age and inexperience in youth. The film actively works against ageist stereotypes by portraying Carl as a multidimensional character with strengths, vulnerabilities, and the capacity for adventure, and Russell as a capable, thoughtful, and resilient young individual.

The story then moves onto a thrilling climax with a showdown between Carl, Russell, and Muntz. The showdown between Carl Fredricksen and Charles Muntz in the end serves as a poignant exploration of ageism, challenging stereotypes associated with older individuals. Throughout the narrative, Muntz, an elderly explorer idolized by Carl in his youth, becomes the antagonist driven by an obsessive pursuit of a rare bird to regain his lost glory. Muntz's character reflects ageist fears of irrelevance and the desperate desire to cling to past achievements. The clash between Carl and Muntz goes beyond a conventional battle; it symbolizes the tension between different perspectives on aging. Muntz, driven by a fear of being forgotten and a desire for external validation, represents the negative aspects of aging – the desperate attempt to reclaim a sense of importance. In contrast, Carl's journey challenges ageism by portraying an older individual who seeks fulfillment in new adventures, embracing change and rediscovering the value of human connections. The setting of the showdown, a dirigible high above Paradise Falls, becomes a metaphorical battleground where ageism is confronted. Muntz, consumed by bitterness and the fear of obscurity, is willing to sacrifice everything, including integrity and compassion, to prove his worth. Meanwhile, Carl's determination to protect the rare bird and Russell, the young boy who becomes an integral part of their journey, signifies a more nuanced view of aging. It underlines the importance of intergenerational collaboration and the potential for continued purpose and heroism in the later stages of life. Roger Ebert, renowned film critic of the Chicago Sun-Times, writes on his blog “There are stakes here, and personalities involved, and two old men battling for meaning in their lives. And a kid who, for once, isn't smarter than all the adults.”

The confrontation challenges ageist assumptions about the limitations of older individuals. Carl's resilience, resourcefulness, and courage debunk stereotypes that depict the elderly as frail or incapable. The film portrays Carl as a hero whose age does not define his capacity for adventure or his ability to stand against adversity. And the character of Muntz serves as a cautionary tale about the destructive consequences of succumbing to age-related anxieties. Muntz's obsession with the past not only jeopardizes his morality but also

highlights the potential dangers of allowing ageist fears to dictate one's actions. Through this confrontation, the film promotes a more inclusive and positive understanding of aging, emphasizing the potential for growth, resilience, and heroism regardless of age. Carl's journey becomes a testament to the richness of experiences and the capacity for change and adventure at any stage of life. In the end, Carl realizes that his obsession with reaching Paradise Falls was a means of holding onto the past and Ellie's memory. He lets go of his house, symbolically releasing the burden of grief. Carl and Russell return home, where Carl, now appreciating the adventure in his own backyard, forms a new family with Russell and his other friends.

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