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Presentation

Ageism: A barrier to social inclusion in the twenty-first century

Speaker

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Abstract

This paper investigates and critiques common sense understandings of age and ageing, and their political and sociological bias and analytic limitations using examples from public policy initiatives to 'digitally transform' public services. I shall define ageism as a relationship of generational abstraction, dichotomy, unreality, invisibility and exclusion, and discuss examples of ageist representations of older people online, in digital public service provision. I shall argue that homogenous and dichotomous conceptualisations of age, commonly paired with 'generational divides' discourses limit our understanding of intra-generational diversity and exclusion in the digital era. Culturally entrenched ageist attitudes, institutionalised practice and research design bias can reinforce the marginalisation of older people and reproduce patterns of inequality, including along lines of race and sex, disadvantage and the exclusion of the old and the young alike. I shall apply this framework to a review of the national programme for 'digital by default' provision of public services.