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Addressing How We Talk About Aging N 'Whatever You Do, Don't Say Elderly'

Robin Seaton Jefferson, CONTRIBUTOR

I write about aging, health care and finances for seniors. FULL BIO

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

"Most people don't grow up. Most people age. They find parking spaces, honor their credit cards, get married, have children and call that maturity. What that is, is aging." ~Maya Angelou

Wearing out, crumbling, declining, fading, waning, stale. These are just a few of the synonyms for aging on Thesaurus.com. On a slightly more positive note, though, the word-finder lists maturing, developing, mellowing and getting on.

I guess you can't argue with the English vernacular, but there are people and companies out there that are trying to put a more positive spin on the twilight years. And they're not calling them the twilight years.

Just days ago, the beauty publishing giant *Allure Magazine* declared it would no longer use the term "anti-aging," as they believe among other things, it suggests, "...looking at our life as a hill that we start rolling uncontrollably down past 35."

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Allure's editor-in-chief Michelle Lee, in her article on allure.com, writes, "This issue is the long-awaited, utterly necessary celebration of growing into your own skin — wrinkles and all. No one is suggesting giving up retinol. But changing the way we think about aging starts with changing the way we talk about aging. With that in mind, and starting with this issue, we are making a resolution to stop using the term 'anti-aging.' Whether we know it or not, we're subtly reinforcing the message that aging is a condition we need to battle — think anti-anxiety meds, antivirus software, or antifungal spray."

"Anti-ageing has been a beauty byword since the 1980s, when it was dreamed up by an advertising exec to sell products to older women," says Alyson Walsh in her blog for *The Guardian*. "Is It Time To Ditch The Term 'Anti-Ageing'?"

Allure's announcement comes a month after the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) said it would begin cracking down on advertisements that stereotype gender roles and almost a decade after the ASA started banning ads containing the term. The United Kingdom's independent regulator for all media advertising, said that ads that mock people for not conforming to traditional gender types or reinforce gender roles had "costs for individuals, the economy and society." The decision will result in new rules from the organization next year.

It makes sense that advertisers don't want to make seniors feel bad about their age. The market stands to make bank on senior purchasing now and for the foreseeable future. The number of people over the age of 65 is projected to increase to 72 million—over 20% of the U.S. population—by 2030 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And the Internet is riddled with senior marketing solutions and scholarly articles on elderly consumer behavior.

Jane Cunningham, founder of the site britishbeautyblogger.com, uses the terms 'age inclusive' and 'for older skin' when talking about products she would recommend for women over 50, Walsh writes, regularly taking a stand against an industry that consistently champions youth by promoting a more inclusive approach. "Treating age as something that

Dove, Olay, L'Oreal and Vichy have all coined new phrases for their products in lieu of anti-aging, including Pro Age, Age-Defying, Age Perfect and Slow Age, respectively.

"Language matters, and so does representation – with older models trending and age-shaming terminology being questioned, it feels like things are improving for women over-50, if only a little," Walsh writes. "Admittedly, it's not a walk in the park, but at 53, I'm growing-in my grey hair, embracing my wrinkles and wearing what I please. I know I don't look 35, but I'm fine with that. I've found that most women of my age and beyond are interested in looking good rather than looking younger; and that it's not about age, it's about mindset."

That mindset is being manipulated in the most positive sense in everything from products to pastimes. In what seems like the age of offensiveness and offendedness, changing the language about aging might, in fact, be the one campaign everyone can get behind. After all, we're all in the aging boat.

And we can all agree that language matters. Considering how we talk about aging and how we refer to older folks really isn't new, just slow growing, as evidenced by Marianne Kilkenny's November 2014 article, "How Names Influence Perception: Community and Aging."

Kilkenny founded Women for Living in Community, an online source in a network of individuals, families, groups and professionals focusing on the power of women as advocates and leaders for alternative housing choices.

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"You know what I don't like?," Kilkenny asks. "I don't like the word 'elderly.' I'm not a big fan of 'senior citizen' or 'person of a certain age,' either. There is no perfect option it seems. When you go to a store that offers a discount by age they call it a senior discount. I sometimes think I would like to hear 'wisdom discount' instead. See, the words we use have

New York Times writer Judith Graham tackled the subject in her column "The New Old Age" back in 2012. She opined that maybe we should stop creating categories in the first place.

Neither woman came up with a solution, but they were talking about it.

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