Age-Inclusive Birthday Card Guidelines

The greeting card industry has become a leader in recognizing prejudice based on race, gender, sexual orientation and other identities. It is time to do the same for aging. These guidelines are intended to help birthday card designers and sellers create and market cards that dispel ageist stereotypes. In so doing, the greeting card industry can be at the leading edge of the global movement to end ageism and capture the benefits of the longevity economy.

What is ageism?
Ageism is prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination based on age, whether against younger or older people. Research shows that ageism has negative impacts on our health and financial security, as well as on our communities, workplaces and the overall economy.

Why are you talking about birthday cards?
It may seem harmless to poke fun at age when celebrating a birthday, but unfortunately reinforcing negative stereotypes about age can be damaging. That snarky message is ageist, and when internalized, it can impact decisions on how people live their lives and treat each other.

What about humor?
Ageist jokes may not offend you, but research shows that ageism hurts our mental and physical wellbeing. It reinforces the idea that everyone who is the same age has the same behavior and beliefs, and creates a culture of devaluing people based on age. Generally, acceptable comedy makes fun of those in power, not those who lack it. Even when we turn it on ourselves, we add to the negative cultural conversation about age. One can be clever without demeaning others.

Our call to action

- **To the industry**- Use these guidelines to design, make and sell birthday cards that celebrate birthdays and inspire people to think about their age with positivity.
- **To consumers** - We vote every time we make a purchase. We can let sellers know that we prefer cards that celebrate birthdays at every age, not ones that reinforce stereotypes.

Who we are
Better Birthdays is a global coalition of organizations individually committed to ending ageism in all its forms. We recognize that many birthday cards reinforce ageism. This initiative intends to use birthday cards to talk about ageism, and encourage makers, sellers and consumers to create and purchase birthday cards that celebrate, instead of denigrate, aging.

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Concepts in messaging in visuals

Here are some general guidelines for creating age-inclusive cards. The overriding goal is to avoid words and images that portray stereotypes, especially negative ones, but even positive ones. One starting point is to avoid declaring someone 'old'. This is one of the most common ageist phrases on birthday cards (e.g. "damn you're old"). One of the primary markers of ageism is declaring that old is bad and young is good, or vice versa. Any time the topic turns solely to age, it's ageist.

Avoid	Consider
Stereotypes about getting older • Physical and mental decline • Memory loss • Grumpiness • Loss of enjoyment and participation • Loss of attractiveness • Lack of sexual activity or interest • Digitally incompetency • Aging = developing medical conditions. **Stereotypes about being younger** • Always on their devices and don't know how to have normal conversation • Lazy, arrogant, self-centered, naive • Trendy, creative and innovative • Teenagers are grumpy and unmanageable • Toddlers are generally a nightmare. **Avoid illustrations that depict:** • Exaggerated features & sagging body parts • Accentuating frailty • Older people in belittling medical settings, for instance with bedpans • Decaying flowers and metaphors for loss • Lazy, image-obsessed younger people	**Alternative concepts and messages:** • Birthdays are to be celebrated • A new year calls for new opportunities and adventures • Celebrating accomplishments • Embracing the gifts of aging, like insight, growth, experience • Learning and growing • "We're not done" • Gratitude for being in the recipient's life **Deliberately anti-ageist cards** • Flip the script on ageist stereotypes. For example, instead of Damn, you're old, how about Damn, you're hot! • Honoring your mother, father, or grandparents on their birthday, similar to the way Mothers and Fathers Day. "Thank you for showing me the way." • Let the pro-age role models in your life know that you appreciate them. "You make me excited to grow older." **Also go our our website for more ideas and for examples of birthday cards that we can all be happy to celebrate.**

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An overall guideline - An 'Ism test

Artists can help end ageism by creating designs that prompt us to rethink our assumptions about age. Our culture says that aging is a story of negative decline and loss, loss of fun, beauty, opportunity and ability. Designs that challenge this story or defy age-based stereotypes are actively anti-ageist.

There is a growing segment of people supporting anti-ageist causes, including older adults who are part of the longevity economy, as well as people who challenge "othering" of any kind and believe in social inclusion.

Here is a quick way to see if you are being ageist. Consider that all stereotyping and prejudice, ageism included, are inaccurate, limiting, and damaging. Turn the question around: Is it fair and accurate to judge a person's value based on one characteristic, like body shape, hair color, skin color or height?

If you're not sure about the visuals or the messaging in a card, ask yourself this: Would you consider these types of stereotypes acceptable if they were based on race, gender, sexual orientation or another element of someone's identity?

For more information:

- Go to **BetterBirthdays.org**.
- Watch the video of Changing the Narrative's address to the US Greeting Card Association.

Better Birthdays is a initiative of Changing the Narrative, Canopy and Age-Friendly Vibes. We invite others to join us!

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE
ENDING AGEISM TOGETHER

Canopy
a social imagination project

AGE-FRIENDLY VIBES

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