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Weary Women: Re-constructing retirement in the 21st century

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Understandings of retirement in western cultures have been based on male career patterns and a demarcation of work as a specific role, location and contractual situation. There have been many calls for research into the nature of retirement for women (see for example [Calasanti, 1996; August, 2011](#)). More recently, discourse analytic research has unpacked 'successful ageing' ([Rudman, 2006; Rozanova, 2010](#)) as part of a wider examination of the 'responsibilization agenda' ([Asquith, 2009](#)) for older workers. Of particular relevance is Rudman & Molke's (2009) examination of how 'productive ageing' is discursively shaped in media texts, particularly the promotion of possible identities. Our analytic interest is in women, with a specific focus on the recently labelled 'Wearies' and their construction within media texts. Standing for 'Working, Entrepreneurial and Active Retirees' this refers to a group who find it hard to get paid employment because of their age but who cannot afford to retire.

Our data comes from websites which are intertextually fluid, often combining a variety of textual and visual forms ([Allen, 2011; Landow, 2006](#)). Although Potter (1996), amongst others, noted the importance visual rhetoric, the inclusion of visual analysis within a broader discursive approach is still relatively uncommon, with the management studies being described as having a "blind spot" to the visual aspects of organizational life ([Strangleman, 2004, p 179](#)).

Our analytic focus is stock images, which are commercial or library photographs, often found on websites, news articles and company reports ([Ward, 2007](#)). Here "the purchased image goes through a stage of recontextualization – combination with texts and other images and graphic elements during which it is often substantially altered" ([Frosh, 2001, p. 634](#)). As part of a broader analysis of stock photos and representations of age at work, we became particularly intrigued by these Weary Women and our paper will present our unpacking of this identity based on the visual images we have collected over the last 18 months. We used both Davison (2010) and Rose (2012) to guide visual analysis, considering images alongside their accompanying text. Our analysis thus unpacks different dimensions of the discursive construction of 'weary women', with a particular focus on the different (working) identities that are being 'offered' to older women through media texts, as well as a critical analysis of the notion of 'retirement' as currently constructed.

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