

AGEISM: IT'S NOT JUST ANOTHER ISM

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COURSE OUTCOMES

- Define ageism.
- Articulate the impact of ageism on the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals.
- Examine the ethical responsibility of social workers to advocate against ageism and for social justice for all older adults.
- Explore the reframing in communication and behavior needed to change the societal view of growing older in the United States.

OLD AGE IS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

- Meanings, definitions, and experiences of aging vary across cultures
- What we consider “Old” has changed significantly
- Identification of “Old” considers not only chronological age, but health, functional ability, social roles, and self-perception
- There is no correlation between chronological or biological aging with capability, or capacity, or appearance

AGING

- Most older adults have a positive attitude about growing old
- ~ 9 of 10 said they were more comfortable being themselves
- 80% said they have a strong sense of purpose
- 2/3 said life after age 50 is better than they expected
- Positive attitude about aging seems to protect against health issues

AGEISM – DEFINE IT

- Discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping based on age
- Has been called the “last publicly condoned form of discrimination”
- Undermines views toward older persons
- Linked to poorer health outcomes
- Attributes to the negative views held by healthcare professionals who may see condition (depression) as inevitable in aging
- Takes root when people are young and don’t identify strongly with older adults

- Concept is not new; it is deeply rooted in our culture, and it needs to be addressed



DID YOU KNOW

- 82% of adults between age 50-80 experience one or more forms of everyday ageism in their day-to-day lives
- 65% have exposure to ageist messages
- 45% experience ageism in interpersonal interactions
- 36% have internalized ageism



WHO ARE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE MORE FORMS OF AGEISM

- People age 65-80 vs 50-64
- Women
- Annual household incomes below \$60K
- Poor physical and mental health
- Retired and living in rural area



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Fort Worth Star Telegram, 11/12/2020, Rachel Marsden, Editorial

Last paragraph...

- Biden will be 78 when he assumes the presidency. He'll need to get hip to the new geopolitical reality that's young enough to be his great-grandchild. Can he adapt?



Technology Simplified – Bigger and Better

Wow! A Simple to Use Computer Designed Especially for Seniors!

Easy to read. Easy to see. Easy to use. Just plug it in!



NEW

Now comes with...

Larger 22-inch hi-resolution screen – easier to see

16% more viewing area

Simple navigation – so you never get lost

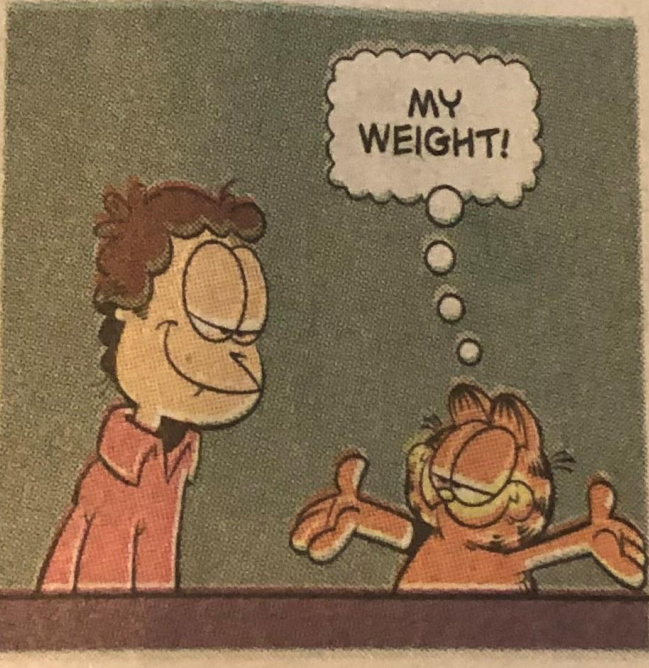
Intel® processor – lightning fast

Computer is in the monitor – No bulky tower

Text to Speech translation – it can even read your emails to you!

U.S. Based Customer Service

FREE
Automatic
Software Updates







HOW IS AGEISM BEING PERPETUATED

- Do you send birthday cards that make fun of, or demean, aging?
- Do you make comments such as “I doubt my clients can handle that computer program” without really knowing your clients’ abilities?
- Do you say things like “he dresses like an old man”, “do you think she can make it up the stairs, she’s 79”?
- When someone says “you don’t look your age” – do you take it as a compliment?



HOW IS AGEISM BEING PERPETUATED

- “Oh gosh, I am having a senior moment” said when we forget something like what we were about to do, or where we left our phone, or what we were about to say
- Holding the view that arthritis, difficulty sleeping, or heart disease are a part of normal aging and “there’s nothing to be done” – these folks are less likely to see a physician to get screenings, the flu shot, wear seatbelts, engage in exercise
- Language used to describe aging and older adults:
 - My 83 year old mother still drives
 - Though she’s 85, she’s really active
 - My uncle is 91 but he has all his marbles

Farsetta, 2016

CATEGORIES OF AGEISM

- Elderspeak – “baby” talk
- Microaggressions – everyday slights that harbor underlying attitude, in this case, ageism; erodes self-esteem, closes doors to opportunities
- Undertreatment – why bother with this test, does not have long to live
- Overtreatment – he has Medicare, let’s do a bunch of tests
- Elder profiling – assuming all older people have dementia so the speaker addresses the adult children or accompanying caregiver

WHERE IS AGEISM SEEN

- Ageism is built into the institutions and systems that shape our lives
- Workplace policies and practices
- Health care resources
- Membership organizations
- Media

Framework Institutes, 2017

SURVEY RESULTS

- 8 of 10 experienced one or more forms of everyday ageism: comments about ability to hear, see or understand, and assumptions that they need help with tasks they can do on their own
- 65% reported exposure to ageist messages in materials they watch or read that portray aging as unattractive, undesirable or worthy of ridicule
- ~ 50% said they encountered ageism in their daily interactions: other people's assumptions that they can't use technology or have a poor memory

AGEISM AND COVID-19

Ageism would suggest:

...that only older people should worry about getting COVID-19. In fact, people of all ages can get it

...that age is the primary risk factor for COVID-19. In fact, data reveal other factors that can increase the risk for all adults

...that only older people are dealing with loneliness and isolation. In fact, people of all ages can be impacted socially and emotionally.

...that isolation is particularly difficult for older people because they cannot use technology to community with family and friends. In fact, many older people use internet and digital devices to maintain social relationships.

https://www.geron.org/images/gsa/reframing/AgeismInfographic_final.pdf

AGEISM IMPACTS HEALTH

Structural Measures

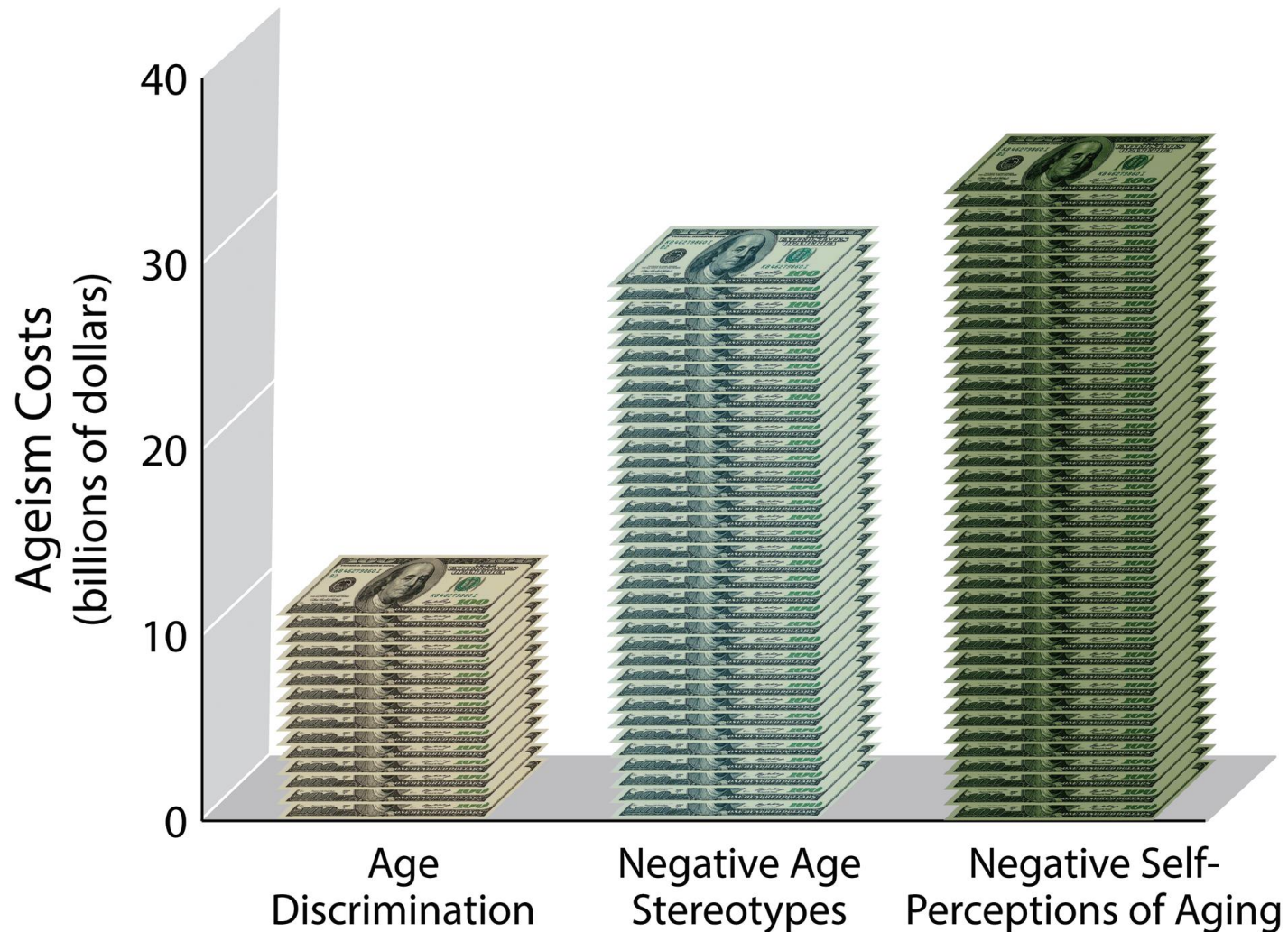
- Denial of access to health care
- Exclusion from clinical trials
- Having resources, including medical services, rationed because of their age
- Limited work opportunities

Individual Measures

- Decreased longevity
- Poorer quality of life
- Compromised social relationships
- Risky health behaviors
- Mental illness
- Cognitive impairment
- Physical illnesses

AGEISM AND HEALTH CARE COSTS

- 1 year cost of ageism was \$63 billion, or one of every seven dollars was spent on the 8 health care conditions; 15.4% of overall health care spending
- Ageism resulted in 17.04 million cases of the eight most expensive health conditions among Americans aged 60 or older
- The eight conditions: cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, musculoskeletal disorders, injuries, diabetes, mental disorders, non-communicable diseases, treatment of smoking



- The health condition that showed the highest excess cost among the three predictors of ageism was cardiovascular disease.
- Exposure to negative age stereotypes leads to heightened cardiovascular stress and predicts their risk of experiencing cardiovascular events
- High cost of treating cardiovascular conditions

IMPLICIT BIAS

- Implicit Bias: our attitudes towards people or when we associate stereotypes with people without our conscious knowledge
- Ageism has risen from a common process that works automatically, but the process can be changed

AGEISM AND BIASES

- A study by Busso, et al tested the effect of a framing intervention on implicit age bias in a nationally representative sample of American adults
- Findings indicated that reframing messages about aging can decrease implicit bias against older adults.
- The study highlighted ways for communicators to promote a positive understanding of the aging process, thereby mitigating sources of implicit prejudice.

Journals of Gerontology: PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES, 2019, Vol. 74, No. 4

PERCEPTIONS: NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE

- Negative perceptions: decrepit, useless, put out to pasture, unattractive, decaying body parts, stubborn, untrainable, sad, demented
- Positive perceptions: relaxation, satisfaction, giving back, freedom, contentment, adventure

PERCEPTION IMPACTS LONGEVITY

- The findings (Levy et al, 2002) suggest that the self-perceptions of stigmatized groups can influence longevity
- Self-perceptions of aging had a greater impact on survival than did gender, socioeconomic status, loneliness, and functional health in this cohort
- Researchers found that people with a positive self-perception of aging had an increased life span of 7.5 years; the will to live partially mediated this effect
- The effect of more positive self-perceptions of aging on survival is greater than the physiological measures of low systolic blood pressure and cholesterol, each of which is associated with a longer life span of 4 years or less

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 2, 261–270

POSITIVE IMPACT ON AGING

People who maintain a positive perception of aging

- Have lower rates of memory loss and dementia
- 44% more likely to recover from a disability
- More likely to engage in preventive behaviors: wearing seat belts, getting flu shots, watch their weight and diet

Abramson, B. National Council on Aging presentation, June 2020

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

SOCIAL WORK CORE VALUES

- Social Justice
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Address the injustice caused by ageism
- Pursue social change
- Treat each person respectfully with attention to individual differences, cultural and ethnic diversity

TAKE THE IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST

- Become aware of your implicit biases related to aging and older adults
- Go to the webpage:
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>
- Click on Take a Test (you do not need to log on, nor create an account)
- You will see a list of tests in blue boxes, click on Age IAT
- Upon completion of the test, you will receive information on your age group reference

NASW AGING AND WELLNESS POLICY

The policy:

- Promotes optimal physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, and functional well-being of people as they age
- Promotes the elimination of biases and policies that contribute to the poor well-being of older adults.

AGEISM AND ETHICS AND COVID-19

Should age be used to ration scarce resources?

Ventilators

Medication to alleviate symptoms - Remdesivir

Vaccination

CHANGING SOCIETAL THINKING ABOUT AGING

- Frame Works Institute's research shows aging is misunderstood, and misinterpretations create obstacles to productive practice and policies
- Promote policies and practices that support a robust, healthy, and age-integrated society
- Systemic change is needed to adjust to a society with increased longevity – "aging attitude adjustment"

OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

- Call out ageism when you see it or hear it
- Use the right language to avoid proliferation of ageism
- Avoid equating aging with decline
- Avoid describing the aging of the population as a crisis
- Practice reframing with the communication tools
- As knowledge increases, attitudes improve, and policy support grows to confront ageism

YOUR MISSION: MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Examine your agencies/programs bylaws, policies, documents, advertising ... – what ageist wording, concepts, beliefs do you see?
- I'd like you to examine how you might be perceptualizing ageism. How do plan to change this behavior?

Resource: www.reframingaging.org



**Do you advocate on issues
that affect older Americans?**



Join the Reframing Aging effort.
http://bit.ly/aging_toolkit

REFRAMING

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**People need a new way
to think about aging.**



We found it.
http://bit.ly/aging_toolkit

WHAT DOES REFRAMING LOOK LIKE

- Set Goals
- Change the language
- Describe ageism
- Change the Frame
- Focus on Solutions
- Keep Learning
- Ageism ends with action

SET GOALS

- Recognize that older adults are a diverse group – older adults have a wide range of strengths, skills, interests, and needs
- Provide community support – enable older adults to remain engaged and active
- Develop policies and resources – enable our society to respond to challenges and benefits of people living longer

CHANGE THE LANGUAGE

- Say 'older people' or 'older adult'
- Avoid "othering" older adults
 - We all are aging
 - Othering older adults reduces the public's sense that we all need to create change
 - Replace 'they', 'them' with 'we', 'us'
- Frame aging as a community and systemic issue rather than an individual one.
- Beware of ableism trap
- Avoid implying impending disaster

WORDS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Another part of the experiment gave people one of these labels and asked them to indicate how old they thought the person was. Responses from all participants were averaged—and the mean ages were as follows:



PREFERRED TERM FOR US – YOU, ME, AND EVERYONE ELSE WHO ARE 60+

- Currently, the progressive voices in the aging field are using “older adults”
- Recommendation from the FrameWorks Research: “older people”

GAPS BETWEEN EXPERT AND PUBLIC THINKING ABOUT AGING

- How should we approach aging – embrace or battle
- What determines outcomes and who is responsible – environment or individuals
- How big of a concern is ageism – important or absent from thinking
- What can be done to ensure wellbeing in older age – plenty or nothing much
- What is the role of public policy – central or limited

REFRAMING OUR LANGUAGE

INSTEAD OF USING	TRY
Tidal Wave, Tsunami, or catastrophic terms for growing aging population	Talk affirmatively about the changing demographics: “as Americans live longer and healthier lives...”
“Choice”, “planning”, “control”, or other individual determinants of aging outcomes	Emphasize how to improve social contexts: “let’s find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age”
“Seniors”, “elderly”, “aging dependents” and similar “other-ing” terms – stereotypes	Use more neutral words: “older people/Americans /Texans, and inclusive: “we” and “us” terms

REFRAMING OUR LANGUAGE

INSTEAD OF USING	TRY
“Struggle”, “Battle”, “Fight” : conflict-oriented words to describe aging experience	“Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with communities” – Building Momentum
Using word “ageism” without explanation	Define ageism: “Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes”
Making generic appeals to the need to “do something” about aging	Use concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions

You Say...They Think

Strategic framing is about choosing communications cues that activate productive ways of thinking. The graphic below illustrates how statements that sound reasonable to an aging advocate or expert ("You Say") may activate listeners' unproductive, but dominant, habits of thought ("They Think") and suggests framing strategies that can make your messages more effective.

You Say...	They Think...	What's Triggered in Their Minds?	What Helps...
Ageism must be treated as a serious social issue so that older people can participate fully as workers and citizens.	Ageism? Is that a real thing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Older as "Other"</i> • <i>Perceived "Real" (deterioration, dependence)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Justice to prime people to think about our cultural commitment to equality for everyone. • Define "implicit bias." Research shows that simply explaining what it is and how it works can be effective in reducing people's bias against older people. • Offer an explanatory example, like workplace discrimination, to show how ageism works and how it affects us all. • Share specific Solutions to expand people's thinking about what can be done.
Older age can be a richly creative and productive phase of life, especially if we address the social determinants that influence people's aging process.	Sure, if you're lucky -- or rich! -- you can get a second wind. But most people are just hoping their health doesn't give out before their 401K does.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fatalism</i> • <i>Individualism</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Ingenuity to prime people to think about how new approaches and collective action can lead to better conditions and outcomes for everyone. • Use the metaphor Building Momentum to "flip the script" on pervasive, negative models of aging and explain how older adults can be a dynamic resource for our society. • Offer a concrete example of collective solutions, like Intergenerational Community Centers, to show how system-level changes can make things better.
As the number of older adults grows with the retirement of the Baby Boomers, it is critical to expand the size and improve the training of our geriatric and health care workforce.	We have three hospitals in my town, and that seems like more than enough to me!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Black Box/Cognitive Holes</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the value Ingenuity to orient listeners to help engage people in a problem-solving mindset. • Use the Building Momentum metaphor to show how taking steps to help people remain in the workforce and to thrive as they age can reduce the burden on the health care system. • Include Solutions that show the scale of the interventions necessary.
An increasing number of families are at risk of bankruptcy because of the high costs of caring for older loved ones. We need to adopt policies that can reduce this financial burden.	I wouldn't count on Social Security. It's been mismanaged for years. The best thing we can do is teach people how to save more when they're young.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Zero-Sum Thinking</i> • <i>Nostalgia /</i> • <i>Threat of Modernity</i> • <i>Solution = Better Personal Choices</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Ingenuity to redirect thinking towards system-level problems and solutions and to foster optimism about our ability to address the problem. • Tell a complete story that helps people to understand the public consequences of inaction: what's at stake, how the system works now, what isn't working, and what can be done to improve outcomes.

CHANGE THE FRAME

- Frame the conversation differently
- Framework's research found the most effective way to improve the public's age-related knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences was to use the following themes:
 - Justice
 - Ingenuity
 - Momentum

JUSTICE, INGENUITY, & MOMENTUM

Justice

we must not marginalize participation of older people nor minimize their contributions

explain the systemic cause of and solutions to ageism

Ingenuity

work together, create innovative programs and policies that enable older adults and people with disabilities to remain engaged and active

Momentum

provide services and supports that enable older people to stay connected and engaged, open the community to this dynamic source of power

AGEISM ENDS WITH ACTION

- Learn more about ageism
- Tell your friends and colleagues
- Spend time with older people
- Avoid ageist comments and jokes
- Promote intergenerational experiences
- Get involved

PLEDGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

I pledge to recognize the rich skills, talents, and worth of every [Texan], regardless of their age. Ageism is harmful to individuals, our workforce, and our communities. We must work together to change perceptions about aging in order to grow a [community] where we can all age, thrive, and contribute together.

Source: Reframing Aging SanFrancisco

“Never put an age limit on your dreams.”

COACH

Dana Torres - US Olympic Swimmer



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RESOURCES

- Ageism Hurts All San Franciscans:

<https://endageism.com/>

- Ageism in America: Reframing the Issues and Impacts:

<https://www.asaging.org/blog/pernicious-problem-ageism#toc>

- Changing the Narrative:

<https://changingthenarrativeco.org/resources/reframing/>

RESOURCES

- Frame Works Institute:

<http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>

- Gaining Momentum:

<https://frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/aging/>

- Miami-Dade Age Friendly

<https://www.giaging.org/resources/miami-dade-age-friendly-parks-toolkit/>