

Call to Justice: “JusticeGram” of the Salvatorian Family USA

Ageism: Systemic Oppression

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Ageism is a systemic form of oppression against people of specific age groups. It is based on prejudice and untested assumptions and misconceptions, such as the idea that all older adults are unintelligent or uncooperative. It is both a socially constructed way of thinking negatively and stereotypically about older persons and a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young. Ageism actually goes “both ways” and oppresses the young as well as the older. Here, we will focus on elders.

Ageism is not taken as seriously as other forms of discrimination, yet it has the same negative economic, social and psychological impacts. The number of older adults in the U.S. is growing, making ageism an increasingly important issue.



Types of Ageism

Consider your own experiences. Have you experienced or encountered ageism that is:

- Perpetuated through institutional policies or practices?
- Interpersonal- through social interactions?
- Internalized or applied to yourself?
- Patronizing or childlike?
- Explicit or consciously connected to ageism beliefs?
- Implicit or unconscious discrimination?

You are not alone. Eighty-two percent of older Americans report experiencing ageism regularly, including in media messages and interpersonally. Thirty-six percent reported evidence of internalized ageism.

Ageism blinds experts to the obvious:

“Unnatural Causes: The Case of the Texas Serial Elder Murders”

Nov. 21, 2022 article

<https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/advocacy/info-2022/texas-elder-murders.html>

Where does Ageism exist?

It is tempting to say “everywhere!”

In the workplace, it includes refusing to hire people over a certain age, asking for age at a job interview, enacting policies that unfairly privilege one age group over another, and viewing older people as less productive, too expensive, or stuck in their ways.

In families, communities, and other groups, ageism is interpersonal. It can take the form of ageist jokes or implying one is less valuable due to age. It can be found in generalizations applied to certain generations, and can be used to deceive, undermine or control.



Ageism is also evident in healthcare. You may have experienced “Elderspeak” which infantilizes and patronizes elderly patients. Inaccurate ideas about aging can result in inappropriate medical care. Research shows that elders get less care, less attention, and less treatment. In some cases, older people may face coercion or violence in healthcare.

Ageism affects everyone, not just those who are elders. It has far-reaching consequences in higher healthcare spending. It exacerbates poverty. It has societal implications that impact all.

Stopping Ageism

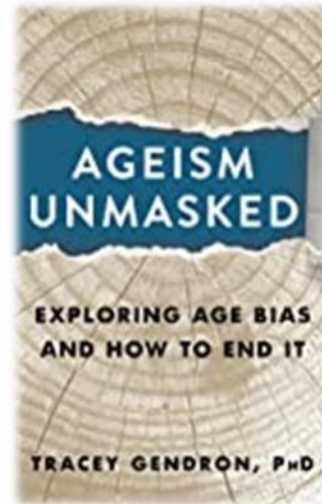
Research shows that there are three specific approaches that stop or reduce ageism. These approaches parallel effective actions addressing other systemic oppressions. **Education** can dispel myths and stereotypes and raise awareness of the impact of ageism. **Intergenerational interventions** can create empathy and cooperation between age groups. As always, **law and policy changes** can reduce inequity and discrimination across systems. This is powerful, providing for significant societal benefits impacting everyone.

Let Us Pray:

- ◇ For courage to build bridges of understanding among all people.
- ◇ For our global, national and local leaders and all those who work to create public policy: that all may be willing to work together to support the common good,
- ◇ For victims of ageism in the workplace, in healthcare, and in interpersonal relationships,
- ◇ For those who recognize ageism and have the courage and knowledge to “name it and claim it” and then work to create change,
- ◇ For all who struggle with self-image during the Elderhood part of their life, that they may embrace the gifts God offers.

Become an Ally

- ◆ **Become aware:** Reflect upon ways that ageism shapes your own thoughts, feelings and life experiences.
- ◆ **Learn:** Learn how ageism affects others by listening to personal stories, reading books, and researching.
- ◆ **Developing skills:** learn and practice advocacy skills
- ◆ **Take action:** Put this knowledge into practice by correcting stereotypes, challenging jokes, and speaking out against discrimination. (This does not involve rescuing people, but rather supporting and advocating for them in situations where they are struggling to be heard.



This article is based on the book **Ageism Unmasked: Exploring Age Bias and How to End It** by Tracey Gendron PhD. , which aims to “inspire people of all ages to embrace aging as our universal and lifelong process of developing over time -- biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. <https://www.thriftbooks.com/w/ageism-unmasked-exploring-age-bias-and-how-to-end-it/28982499/item/53842869>

Elderhood:

Becoming Our Charism

Sr. Patricia Kieler, SDS

Ageism in our culture impacts all of us to some degree, urging us to fear and avoid signs of diminishment, warding off as long as possible our inevitable decline. But what if our decline is really a necessary gradual loss and transition that empties us for the option of a whole new life stage, called Elderhood, a call to full maturity.

In this new season of Elderhood, we're drawn toward a new strength and gift: wisdom. In the move from doing to more being, we find ourselves invited to a letting go, a receptivity and a deeper listening to my own life and to all life. We begin to understand the awesome connections and the di-



vine Providence in my life. Integrating the crosses and wounds, the graces and successes, the light and the dark of my life can transform my perception into a deep wisdom.

We Salvatorians were drawn and committed ourselves to knowing “This is eternal life: to know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” We engaged our whole being in that charism and mission, proclaiming Jesus in our diverse ministries and lives,

making known the goodness and kindness of Jesus. Maybe, in surrendering to the vocation of Elderhood, we come to recognize that we have become the one we proclaimed, a unique presence of Jesus, not by our own doing, but by grace. We gradually grow more fully into our authentic selves: simple, humble, poor, forgiving and forgiven, gentle, beautiful, deeply fired and transformed, even in our diminishment. We begin to see this in each other. Now we really know God somehow, in the benevolence of God who shapes us and loves us as we are. Perhaps we have become our charism.

For our Salvatorian community, Elderhood is not a solo stage, but an invitation to an incredible deepening of community. In our weakness, we are strength for each other. And in our diversity lies our richness. The call to Elderhood is common to us all, but we each make that journey alone in our own timing, supported by the

respect and compassion of the community.

What if we were to see ourselves as a round basket of grain, where every grain is needed and unique, where one grain makes up for what the other does not have? Then in the meltdown of the grains, which is necessary for the bread to rise, we become one bread for the world. In Elderhood, too, we make God known.

[For a deeper exploration of the meaning of Elderhood and charism, please download Sr. Pat's article from the resource list below.]



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Learn More

<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ageism-and-age-discrimination-fact-sheet>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/ageism#examples>

Kieler, Patricia. (2022) *Elderhood: A Time to Become Our Charism*. LCWR Occasional Papers– Summer 2022. pg. 15-16. <https://tinyurl.com/ElderhoodKieler>

