

Let's End Ageism

There's a local television commercial that opens with four older women in a back yard. Three of them are seated while the fourth is hanging photographs on a clothesline with clothespins. When one of the other women asks her what she's doing, she replies, "I'm putting my pictures 'on line' so that my grandchildren can see them." With a bemused smile the questioner explains to her that the term refers to posting pictures

On the Senior Agenda



By William F. Flynn Jr.

stereotype---many old people are stupid and out of touch with modern technology, before listening to the sponsor's sales pitch. This ad confirmed a point made by Janice Blanchard and others that ageism is the last widely acceptable form of discrimination in our society. Would any company dare to run such an ad featured all people of color or one ethnicity instead of older women?

So what are we to do about ending ageism? First we need to become aware of the widespread messages and policies based on ageism, and analyze whether we have internalized some of those ageist notions. There's even some research indicating that if we as seniors buy into that prejudice, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that's bad for our own future health.

Ashton Applewhite has pointed out that "ageism is a prejudice that pits us against our future selves." (I recommend her TED talk "Let's End Ageism" on YouTube.) I was recently racing out of a grocery store, when at the exit I found myself stuck behind

down. Prejudices are socially-constructed ideas and values that are widespread, but we can recognize them and address them in ourselves.

But we must do more to call out public expressions of ageism and push back against them. Maggie Kuhn

she challenged him to stop doing skits where he got laughs playing an elderly "bag lady," and he did.

I have written to the owners of the company sponsoring that ageist commercial and assured them they have lost my business until they get rid of it.

"Ageism is a prejudice that pits us against our future selves."

an elderly man. He was bent over with severe kyphosis and was pushing his cart very slowly out the door, no doubt going as fast as he could. As I started to grumble to myself about his slow pace, I remembered my own tilted back and had a flash of realization that I was seeing my future self ahead of me and I calmed

founded the Gray Panthers to fight against ageism after she was forced to quit her administrative assistant job due to an arbitrary age limit of 65. She organized Gray Panthers "media watch" groups to identify and challenge ageist content in television and movies. As a guest on the Tonight Show hosted by Johnny Carson,

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on the Internet. The others, and presumably the tv audience, have big laughs all around at the expense of this silly old lady.

Interestingly there's no connection between this opening and the products promoted by the rest of the ad. I guess we're supposed to enjoy a feel-good moment based on an ageist