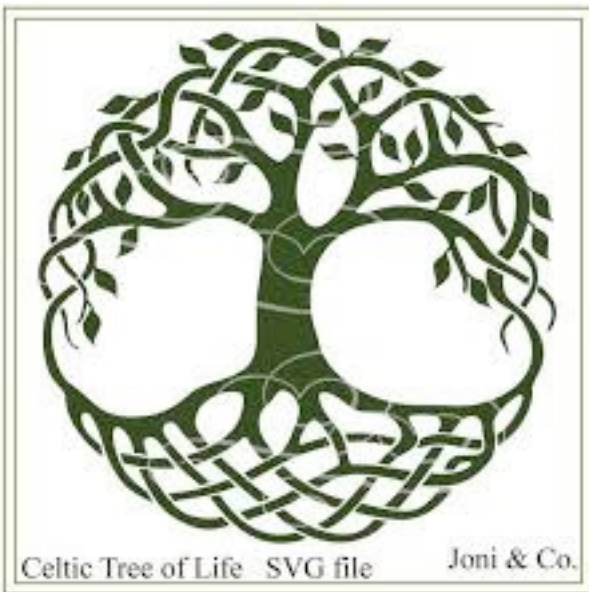


PASSING THE POWER ON

Connecting Ages, Changing Ageism

How do we hold the awareness that we are part of a long line of people working for social justice? How can all ages place new contributions into that line and at the same time continue and build upon the breakthroughs which activists from the past have forged? This is our dynamic challenge.



A dialogue booklet
on Ageism and Intersectionality
from Traprock Center for Peace and Justice
Third Booklet in the Dialogue Series

Compiled by Sarah Pirtle, director of the
Traprock Common Threads Project.

This booklet provides a structure for discussing how to recognize and change ageism in progressive community groups and illuminates how to seek, respect, and include the contributions of all ages.

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1. OVERVIEW

What power do we want to pass along? People of every age have things to teach and things to learn. At the crux of ageism is how we pass power and what kind of power we pass.

The problem of ageism includes elders not making room for youth leadership and it includes youth not taking the chance to sift and incorporate experiences of elders and those who've come before in history.

Ageism affects both directions of the age spectrum. Generally people younger than twenty and older than sixty are treated with less respect in this culture. We don't want to replicate that engrained problem. At Traprock we want the communication discoveries we make to be available. This booklet provides details about the work we are forging in this area.

As part of the Common Thread dialogue series of Traprock Center for Peace and Justice, Larkin Christie and I co-led a day-long conference on ageism and then a shorter three-hour workshop. We are leaders who are more than fifty years apart in age. We want the design that we used and the comments which were made by participants to be available so that other progressive circles and social-change organizations can work with these formats and develop their own directions.

We felt we were doing something new. This was the first time we had heard of where people gathered and gave permission to each other to talk about ageism and where people consciously set out to describe and discover together what it does and how to address it.

How we described the events: "Every age has something to teach and something to learn. This day will foster multi-age understanding, friendships and collaboration. As we articulate ways that ageism comes up in

progressive circles, working on it can make us a more supportive community and more effective in our activist work. This is a day when you will be encouraged to discover helpful new insights.”

Why focus on ageism?

“Age is a road in the intersection of oppressions that is often not talked about and acknowledged but, like every other oppression, it contributes to holding all the others in place. We can feel more alone if other people aren’t facing it, so we want to have these conversations more directly.”

--- Larkin Christie, age 16,

Youth Rise Together co-founder, Whately, MA

“Ageism hits at the fundamental continuity of life -- one age relating to the next, passing knowledge, and making new knowledge. The work for social justice is stronger when there’s shared history, cumulative gains, insights and practices gathered and passed along to each succeeding generation. I am realizing how central it is to be able to pass progressive power from generation to generation. That depends upon trust and communication.”

-- Sarah Pirtle, age 68,

Traprock Board member, Shelburne Falls, MA

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF AGEISM

*We can make a commitment to a sustainable life
that leaves a real legacy for our children. We must
learn how to metabolize the truth.*

-- Lama Willa

When we start to examine ageism, we open up a deeper understanding about what respect looks like for any of us. That’s the journey we are invited to take -- to seek insights about valuing each person within our shared web of life.

These gatherings gave people a chance to think freshly. The format of this booklet is that we start with a general look at the dynamics of addressing ageism. Next, the basic workshop design that we used will be presented. Following this will be more collected comments which could be used to start conversations. Just as a braided rope is stronger than a single strand, we have braided our efforts to compile this resource. The voices you'll hear are many for we have also added in the stories and observations of people of every generation.

One participant shared this realization, "It's occurring to me that the word "age" is really both a noun and a verb. All humans no matter how long they have been alive are in the process of aging."

"I believe the key to fighting ageism is keeping an open mind, and trying to understand the perspectives of different generations and what they face. I want people to not make assumptions about me based on my age and when we meet each other I want to recognize that we are both just human. Before today I wasn't aware that older people experience ageism as well, so I found it interesting to connect with people on that shared experience, even if we have experienced it in completely different ways."

-- Anonymous conference participant

A seventeen-year-old shared details of her feelings. "I experience ageism often, especially in activism work. The thing I struggle with most when facing ageism is how to respond. In the conference today, during the like-ages break out, I feel like I got some ideas about how to 'speak up'. But beyond speaking up as a young person, I've realized how important it is for older people to be allies of younger people.

I don't think progressive older people realize things they do that I feel are demeaning. Some examples are the problem that comes up when they turn to us and ask us to speak up, thinking they are doing that in our favor, but really it puts a spotlight in an uncomfortable way. I want to ask older people to not 'out' young people in groups by thanking them or asking them to speak for their age or generation as a whole. Instead I want them to

have a sense of true and real mutual respect toward young people as valuable and equal members of a community.”

As we began to identify our ages, a person who is age 15 said, “There seems to be a window of ages where no one wants to say how old they are. It’s as if they are ashamed that they are a person who may be ‘growing old.’ When you’re a kid you are always so specific about your age, because 7 ½ is so much older than 7. You’d compare with your friends -- Well, I’m seven and three quarters. Yeah? Well, I’m almost 8. Then I think when you reach 80 or over, all of a sudden you start saying your age again. No one makes it to 100 and says they are only 95. Why should we be ashamed of that window? We are all human, and we are all still growing and changing as much as we were when we were kids.”

One of the problems that comes up in multi-age communication is if older people don’t expect a younger people to make wise observations and they overly compliment or laugh and make a joke such as “I wouldn’t have been able to figure that out when I was your age.” That’s disrespectful, and yet it’s common for older people to express surprise to hear such a well-thought comment coming from someone who is fifteen.

Ashton Applewhite in her brilliant book, *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism*, offers a pivotal question: “What might an age-friendly world -- friendly to *all* ages that is -- look like?”

“Ageism is the last acceptable prejudice.

It’s a prejudice against our future self.

Everyone is old or ‘future old.’ Aging is living.”

-- Let’s End Ageism - Ashton Applewhite TED TALK

Often discussion about ageism looks in one direction. Author Margaret Gullette gives voice to disrespect of elders: “The sudden onset of age-related shaming can occur anywhere—the shove in the street, the cold shoulder at the party, the deaf ear at the meeting, the shut-out by the personnel office or the obtuseness of a government.”

--*Ending Ageism* by Margaret Gullette, Rutgers University Press.

Let's also include the other direction of disrespect -- that of disrespect for younger people. I would add that likewise the disregard of those under twenty can happen anytime.

Examples:

- * a nervous laugh from older people after a younger person speaks
- a joke made when the pronoun "they" is shared
- being asked to be the spokesperson for your generation
- treated as furniture rather than a person with an opinion
- receiving questions that feel demeaning.

This summary was created and presented by younger people at the end of the conference.

How to Be an Ally to Young People:

- Make sure you don't ask that one young person is in effect being treated as the representative of all younger people.
- Everyone should get an equal voice in the group.
- Don't laugh at a young person's comment as if it is cute.
- Expect young people to attend. If we aren't expected, we won't come because then the space will feel unwelcoming.
- Reach out directly to young people and extend a pure welcome. "We want you as people but we know historically you haven't been felt included so we're including you specifically."

- Realize that younger people can contribute by looking at things from a different angle.
- Talk to us because you are interested in us and look at us as your equal -- we can feel it when you don't.

Here's an example of unconscious bias. At a progressive gathering, a young woman detailed how she had started a youth-led organization that was democratically run with power sharing. An older activist posed a question and wanted to find out if there were adults who were helping to lead it. From her question, it wasn't clear if she wanted to picture it more clearly or if she worried that college age supporting youth wouldn't be adequate or if this was new and unfamiliar. The example of youth supporting and learning from each other broke an adult expectation of who are the helpers and revealed the self-sufficiency of youth leaders.

KEY QUESTIONS

How can we look at ways we are shutting out people from age-based assumptions?

How can we call into question the assumptions we unconsciously hold about people of different ages?

How can we examine the way we organize and plan events and the conversations we have so that we see any exclusion we might not have realized we were doing?

3. AGE, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE INTERACTION BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Addressing ageism furthers all our work. Collaboration between ages is fundamental, yet it is undercut by the way that ages are separated in this culture, by misunderstandings and misperceptions, and by active mistreatment that goes unrecognized without intervention.

When I first told people my age that I was helping to put together a conference on ageism, they assumed I was talking about what gets directed toward elders. But what actually drew me was the need for more support of younger people. If you think about the educational system, teachers of early childhood are undervalued. Teachers who work with younger children have less pay and less status. More specifically, what I saw were young teens who I knew well were being addressed by adults in ways that implied their thoughts weren't valuable.

Ageism is a form of oppression that happens frequently, but passes for acceptable behavior. When an NPR host talks down to talented teen musical performers featured on his show, this is ageism. When a male teacher comments upon the clothing of the girls and says they look attractive, it's a combination of ageism and sexism. When strangers label children shy who decide they don't want to talk to them at a restaurant, this is ageism.

Addressing racism and all oppression is embedded in this work. Our exploration has to be intersectional. We aren't putting a focus on ageism in order to minimize focusing on racism, or avoid focusing on any other oppression, and it is important to say that explicitly. Our work is intersectional from the start because we found immediately that ageism directly relates to racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, the dominance of educational systems to shape what knowledge is passed, and other oppressions.

The workshops topics we set up were based on intersectionality. We offered three mixed-age workshops:

- Intergenerational Conversations about Gender Outside the Binary
- Race, Ageism, and Intersectionality
- Multi-age ways of addressing Sexism

The whole wheel of oppression reveals engrained othering, dominance and disrespect designed to narrow the distribution of power and privilege. The basic definition of oppression says that these ‘isms’ are not just about prejudice. They shut out voices, influence, and can be lethal.

Look what would be the impact if progressive people didn’t address ageism. Progressive people would be separated from working together. The kinds of power analysis and other breakthroughs that come from each generation would be narrowed.

Regarding the oppression of ageism, the targeted group has been named as those people under twenty and over sixty. What is unique about ageism is that as we get older we move from being in the targeted group to the dominant group, and have the hindsight of our own experiences to help us be in solidarity and not pass along hurtful ways of relating.

A participant in the conference wrote in her evaluation, “At this multi-generational gathering I am struck by how people of different ages both bring valuable experience and wisdom. Older people bring what they’ve learned over more years and life experience, and younger people bring the perspective of growing up in a particular time, which offers a certain kind of clarity or understanding of issues that are especially relevant now.”

One very problematic assumption is that young people aren’t capable of thinking about and acting for social change. At the conference a person in their thirties asked when I got involved in activism. I explained that I was twelve. Through my Unitarian Church I got imprinted by the Civil Rights Movement with the core idea of solidarity and this commitment stayed life long.

In the closing, one person said, “It was extra lovely for me to be with all ages 15 to 77. There was a fresh honesty. We asked questions. We weren’t trying to say the right progressive things that our age might say. What we heard was unexpected.” Another wrote in their evaluation, “This day cemented intersectionality in an unexpected way.”

4. WORKSHOP DETAILS:

Connecting Ages, Changing Ageism

We held the conference on Saturday January 6, 2018 running from 10 am to 3:30 pm and then we repeated a shorter version in February as a three-hour class for the Sojourner Truth School. Our first conference brought face to face people ages 15 to 77. Our second workshop spanned ages 12 to 80. We met in three kinds of dialogue groups. Like ages talked together, and then we went into mixed-age groups of four. After processing this in the whole circle, lastly, we had topic workshops.

Before presenting the full design of the day, a key ingredient of the dialogue was our use of questions throughout to focus our work. For instance, we put the first two questions on the flyer to draw people.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What do you want to share with someone of a different age engaged in progressive work? What do you want to ask?

What do you want people of a different age to know about your experiences?

What difficult or harmful experiences in relationship to your age have you had that you'd like to describe?

How can a person of a different age be an ally to you?

What assumptions do you not want others to make about you?

DETAILS OF THE CONFERENCE PLANS

When: Saturday January 6, 2018

10 am to 3:30 pm. Arrive 9:30 to start on time.

Where: Northampton Quaker Meetinghouse.

Cost: Free with donations accepted.

All ages 6 and up are welcome to participate in the day.

Bring a lunch. Tea provided.

Convenors: Larkin Christie, Youth Rise Together,
and Sarah Pirtle, Traprock.

This event is part of the Common Threads Program
of Traprock Center for Peace and Justice.

Child care is provided for ages 3 and up if notified by phone in advance.
The Activity Room will be available to people of all ages who need a break.

AGENDA FOR THE CONFERENCE

9:30 Arrive ahead of time to register

10:00 Group Circle and setting the tone
6 guiding questions
Stepping up/stepping back
Different ways ageism shows up
Validating emotions

Group Circle Introduction

Leaders alternated taking the lead on these sections.

(1) Age is a road in the intersection of oppressions that is often not talked about and acknowledged but, like every other oppression, it contributes to holding all the others in place. This is the first gathering of this type that we know of where people have permission to talk about ageism and begin to describe and discover together what it does.

Read six guiding questions listed above.

(2) Introductory go-around:

We're going to start by hearing everyone's voice. Explain go around. Start by giving first name, then pause as the whole group echoes your name. Share town, age and pronouns, and another part of your identity.

We all have the fundamental right to be recognized for who we are. We'll be sharing pronouns in each section of the dialogues today. This can make it a safer social place. In order to change ageism my generation needs and wants to learn more of the understanding that younger generations have about identity. Another part of getting acquainted is to think about your own dimensions of diversity and share one other feature -- it could be your heritage, your spirituality, an interest. In other words we ask ourselves -- "What do I want people to know about me at the start?"

(3) Stepping up/stepping back. Moving up/moving back.

During today we want to make sure everyone's voice is heard. One way to help make that happen is to think about stepping up or stepping back. This has to do with how you usually show up in a group. If you tend to talk less, consider sharing more today, and if you tend to talk more, practice being a deep listener.

(4) Presentation of two frameworks for talking about oppression. Providing this background is important and is described in detail below.

(5) Validating emotions. During the workshop each person has the right to say "oops" or "ouch" if a statement is made that feels hurtful, disrespectful, or oppressive. Putting this in place is acknowledging as a group that we can and will make mistakes. We're all here engaged in this work to continue to learn how to be the most effective activists we can. Part of that is learning how to hear, "that didn't feel good, let's figure out how to make it better". Let's treat each other with compassion all day while continuing to uphold the value of learning.

(6) We moved into small groups of 2-4 to discuss one hope or fear for the day. Coming back to the whole group, there was an invitation for a few people to share in the whole group.

(7) Whatever age you are, feel free to give yourself space and time to advocate for yourself. There are many ways you can do this, but one important one for today is taking a break. People of any age can take a break in the Activity Room.

Basic agreements -- not interrupting, confidentiality.

Frameworks for talking about oppression.

Here are two ways that interlocking oppressions have been diagrammed. One piece of paper shows a wheel with spokes, and one paper shows with the outline of a house.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw is credited with naming and developing the concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw is a full professor at Columbia Law School, where she is the founder and director of the Center for Intersectionality & Social Policy Studies. In the late 1970's the Combahee River Collective -- a Black lesbian feminist collective -- put forward their understanding and description of intersectionality.

In 1981 Equity Institute founded and directed by Carole Johnson and Joan Lester taught trainings with the diagram of a Wheel of Oppression. People in a workshop would be asked to define the spokes in the wheel and might answer -- racism, homophobia, anti-semitism, ableism. The idea is that each spoke keeps the whole wheel in place.

At the trainings we led we asked people to articulate the dominant and targeted groups in terms of that oppression. For ageism, usually it was said that people under 21 and over 60 were targeted.

How many people here are currently in one of these age groups? So unlike other oppressions, the effects shift as ages change and most everyone experiences being at some points targeted and some points dominant. This gives an opportunity to remember and hold solidarity.

Thirty-seven years ago Equity Institute began in Amherst, Massachusetts and led the first training on racism and homophobia for the Amherst police. They did the first racism training for staff and faculty at Smith College. They transferred their office to the Bay Area of San Francisco.

This legacy helps us see the cumulative efforts among generations. We see how strong, pervasive and harmful is racism. Despite generation after generation of efforts, the system of white supremacy holds on. All generations are called to collaborate in changing this whole wheel of oppression. In solidarity we respect all genders and gender expansion and also work to change patriarchy. "I am not free while any woman is unfree even though her shackles are very different from my own," -- Audre Lorde

This second diagram has a picture of a house. It goes with Audre Lorde's words -- "The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's House."

A group of facilitators in the Work That Reconnects network created this format and asked participants to list the bricks of this house. Oppressions that were already existing but not named back in 1981 by Equity Institute were added consciously -- for instance, Islamophobia, transphobia.

Another new concept could be called dominant oppression, which is a new term that I have invented to put together mental health oppression, oppression toward neurological differences, targeting of people with PTSD and priority given to dominator behaviors and bullying.

Today we are together in a life-building cycle. We want to dismantle the harmful lock of power and privilege and challenge ourselves to look at specific things we can do in our own organizing.

In this dialogue today we place ourselves in a different house than this house shown as the Master's House.

FIRST DIALOGUE -- AGE-SIMILAR GROUPS 10:45 - 11:25

We recommend having three groups for the age-similar dialogue.

Forming groups:

When we looked at the ages present in the room, the three groups we formed had these different ages: 15 to 24, 25 to 45, and 45 to 77.

Each person received a copy of these questions and had a chance to pick one question they wanted to speak to during their discussion.

How do you think your/our age affects how you show up in activism work?

Do you feel respected in what you bring to a group?

Does nervousness around confirming age stereotypes make you less effective?

How do you wish people of other ages acted towards you and how is that different from how they do?

How can a person of a different age be an ally to you?

What assumptions do you not want others to make about you?

SECOND DIALOGUE -- MIXED AGES

11:30 We called people back from the dialogue with similar ages. To create smaller groups of mixed ages, first we stood in the age-similar groupings we'd had. From these, we walked toward someone of a different age and mixed ages together to form groups of four.

Small multi-age groups of 4 people share experiences.

Half-hour 11:45 - 12: 15

Step one for multi-age groups -- Share name, pronouns, age.

Step two -- When you were in same age groups,

What surprised you? For instance, things you didn't know other experienced as well, things you haven't experienced that others did, etc..

What feels important for others to know that was said in your group?

Step three -- Also, use the sheet of questions for the age-same groups to help you think about what you want to share during this dialogue..

HOUR FOR LUNCH

12:15 Lunch brought by participants and big tables set up.

1:15 BE ON TIME.

Song call back. "Keep on moving forward," by Pat Humphreys.

Do a general introduction for five minutes about --

How does addressing ageism further all our work?

What are breakthroughs of new understanding?

DIALOGUE THREE --

1:35 - 2:35 THREE INTERSECTIONAL TOPIC WORKSHOPS

Race, Intersectionality and Age

Multi-age ways of addressing Sexism

Intergenerational Conversations about Gender Outside the Binary

Announce workshops, introduce co-leaders, and run them no matter what size the group is.

Before dividing, turn to someone nearby to think out loud about where you want to go.

Process agreements: Each workshop group will begin with a go-around sharing name, pronouns, and the option of sharing briefly one source of influence on your life -- a person, event, experience, identity.

After this go-around, sharing will be optional to recognize all the styles of participation which include listening and having the right not to share.

Intergenerational Conversations about Gender Beyond the Binary

This conversation is focused on how people of all ages can understand and support people whose gender does not fit with what they were assigned at birth. We may discuss how to craft an event that honors everyone, why patience and kindness are key, or any other topics that attendees are excited to talk about.

In this workshop we'll be talking openly about our gender identities with people of many gender backgrounds. Please be mindful of that when choosing to attend.

Intersectionality: Changing Racism, Ableism, Ageism, and all the interlocking oppressions.

The conversation is focused on cross-age exchanges about Anti-racism work and movements.

The two main populations that are most impacted by Ageism are also impacted by many other forms of oppression. Individuals within these two groups have some of the highest rates for Mental Illness and Suicidality, sexual assault, racially motivated hate crimes, and many more form of oppression.

This conversation will be focused in several directions. There will be cross-age exchanges about anti-racism work and movements There will be an honoring of the work that needs to be done around ableism and a chance to look more deeply into that. There will be

a chance for people to share parts of their identity if they choose and spell out ways people can be allies in solidarity.

Multi-age ways of changing Sexism

-- A workshop for all ages and genders.

What would be the most fun, interesting, and informative way to talk about what things our different generations do so that we don't let sexism grind us down?

How can we stick together to make change?

What assumptions do we carry about each other as we take up the centuries long struggle together?

These questions will be offered and other questions also welcomed. We'll let the discussion follow the interests of the people who attend. Bring your own questions you always wanted to ask someone of a different age.

They might include:

Would you share an anecdote, insight or observation that comes up for you when you think of sexism and patriarchy?

How do you see your generation addressing these issues differently than another generation?

How do you want to receive respect?

AFTER WORKSHOPS

2:45. Report back for 5 min. each from topic groups.

3:00 REFLECTION UPON THE WORK WE DID TODAY

: What will we do with the information we got today?
What is a concrete way you will take this forward?

Take five minutes to journal with option to share with a partner.
WHOLE GROUP -- Would anyone be willing to share.

We also asked participants to fill out evaluation forms and specify statements that could be included in this booklet.

5. INSIGHTS COLLECTED FROM THE AGEISM DIALOGUES

Quotes can be selected from this list and you can use them at your own event to spark discussion. These comments were shared either at the January day-long conference or at the February three-hour workshop.

Anonymous:

No matter how young or old you are, your thoughts should always count. I think that people shouldn't decide whether someone's interest or passions are important or unimportant based on their age.

12 year old:

When we were talking about how to be an ally, we said respect someone's opinions no matter your age. This is something that I've struggled with at school, especially with teachers just saying they are right because they're older. Respect is something is a good thing that we should all do.

14 year old:

I learned that I judge people older than myself, just as much as they judge me. It's important to realize the age based judgements you're making, and understand that age isn't a limiting factor. Above all people of different ages need to be involved in the dialogue.

16 year old:

Certain activist spaces feel unwelcome to young people. People feel overly surprised to see young people at meetings and they are condescending and unnaturally encouraging. This reaction comes from not many teens being involved in activism but this is partly because teens feel unwelcome in those spaces. So we need to change the spaces, make them feel more welcoming, and then more teens will come.

Don't forget how being in multiple marginalized groups can put people in a unique position that is often overlooked.

Know when to call out and when to call in. When someone breaks an agreement, don't let it slide by.

25 year old:

Having an intergenerational dialogue is revolutionary, and is a form of resistance in the face of oppression. Attending the dialogue was refreshing and allowed me to ask questions that have always been on my mind, but I have never had the space to ask. It was invigorating to share experiences with different generations, and find their experience to be very similar to my own. This is a fantastic start, and I hope that this leads to more intergenerational collaboration. The one main area that I believe need to be studied is the experiences of ageism and racism, which can not happen without POC. I am inspired by the dialogue, and can't wait for more.

30 year old:

It was so extremely valuable to talk about ageism, sexism, racism and other -isms in intergenerational dialogue. There are so rarely opportunities to share, across generational divides, our lived experiences around our activism work. As a young person, this is something I always crave, since I

have such deep respect for the warriors who came before me. The resounding takeaway of the day was the need for continued dialogue and action that is both intergenerational and intersectional. Our oppressions are all linked and our liberation is only as strong as our willingness to work together and learn across differences. We must also be vigilant in holding ourselves + our peers accountable in doing our work to dismantle the -isms within us and within our communities.

From a dialogue group of people ages 34 - 46

We see our age span as the decision-making ages who make decisions for the other groups. We admit we need input from other ages. We want to learn how to be allies.

We want to create intergenerational opportunities. We want ages to mix. We want to physically be with other ages.

We want to do deep listening and put aside biases to be able to respect the full humanity of people of all ages.

39 year old:

I want to be able to talk about my aging process without people assuming I have a problem with it.

We talked a lot about what various age groups bring to the conversation, but we didn't really touch on our limitations. Both ends of the age spectrum report often feeling dismissed or "othered", but why? What limitations or preconceived ideas are we bringing to the conversation that causes us to dismiss another person?

A man aged 68 -- "I want my core values and my life commitments -- like being at Woodstock and Vietnam protests -- to be known."

Anonymous elder:

When I was young, I felt sorry for old people and imagined they felt scared, as they plodded along to the end of their road.

Now I'm old, I've never been happier. My world has blossomed and so have I.

Another direction for discussion is to spell out assumptions and stereotypes.

What's your guess about what happens to an aging brain?

Ashton Applewhite writes, "The aging process itself confers benefits on the way we think. Especially in the emotional realm, older brains are more resilient. As we turn eighty, brain imaging shows frontal lobe changes that improve our ability to deal with negative emotions like anger, envy, and fear. Olders experience less social anxiety, and fewer social phobias." (This Chair Rocks, pp. 79-80).

6. SOLIDARITY IN PROGRESSIVE CIRCLES ON CHANGING AGEISM

Between generations it's essential to have a basic healthy interaction where there is a dynamic of passing history and values of activism while questioning practices, and developing new insights. It's a back and forth learning and not just one directional.

Previous generations have held up a "do this because I said so" mentality that lacked reciprocal learning. We want to have a true sharing and equality here today. We elders need to make room for refreshment, re-examination, new social inventions and overturning of customs that aren't sustainable and life-affirming."

Conference workshop leader Ahmad Abojaradeh: "I notice the assumption of progressiveness that makes it harder to engage with people and groups who think they have it figured out. I also notice the strength that comes from seeing long commitment. "Where were you when...?" We need to have these intergenerational conversations. Otherwise what has happened

will get forgotten. I want to be learning from the past, yet I don't feel comfortable asking older folks "where were you?" I want to figure out how to acknowledge where you've been all along."

Author Ashton Applewhite describes this research:

EXAMPLES OF AGEISM IN PROGRESSIVE CIRCLES

We compared experiences that we'd had so that we could learn from each other and not replicate harm. If you are leading a dialogue, you can read these stories and ask people to reflect upon them.

Younger person in 2018, under 18:

"Here are things I want older activists to be aware of. What I notice through comments and body language is that there's a sense that our younger generation is not expected to be in activism space. When we are, we are asked to be representative for entire age group. Or a person will talk to us in a condescending tone, and no one steps in to say they noticed this, leaving us alone with the problem."

Miriam's story written in 2018, age 88:

In this very difficult period with Trump and the Republican Party in power, I want to tell people about my experience with McCarthyism. I want to be able to relate some of my experiences in dealing with the Cold War, the time that I had to secretly go into Poland to be part of a World Youth Festival, and how I was eventually called before the House Un American Committee. I want them to know that unfortunately Trump represents the worse of many reactionary periods in this country and that the Cold war made it a "crime" to go to Poland, the Soviet Union etc but I and many others resisted. and eventually defeated Nixon. It was a struggle, it was hard but we persisted.

I want to remind younger people that it is important to know our history and learn from those who have been active participants in change, the ups and downs and the lessons learned.

I did much more after the festival. I have been an activist with women's issues, racism and raised 3 children who all do socially responsible work.

I moved to the Boston area to be closer to my family. I became active in a progressive Jewish organization. The members of this inter generational organization were welcoming but never attempted to find out about my years of being a leader and activist. They were surprised that my husband and I moved into activity so quickly and became involved in various committees. I did eventually get acknowledgement from one member of the Mid East Committee that I had knowledge of organizational structures and some of the power and control issues the organization was dealing with.

It is particularly difficult to be involved when people speak with each other and hearing issues make it difficult to be involved. Even when you ask people to speak up, they tend to eventually ignore the issue. As a result one gives up and becomes more of a listener. If there is to be true inter generational work there has to be sensitivity about accessibility, and a readiness to listen to one another. We have much to learn from each other.

Young people I know are now engaged in direct action. They are showing us all that protest and organizing in the streets and in front of established organizations is having an impact. I am impressed with the diversity and the desire to reach out to all young people of diverse backgrounds. The energy and enthusiasm gives me hope.

My experiences are varied. The best I have had recently was my husband and I visited our 21 year old grandson at his College, Prescott, in Arizona. He was thrilled for our visit and the highlight was sitting in on a class. The class was Marxism, and how events are analyzed using a Marxist analysis. We were welcomed to participate and the class was wonderful. The students were thoughtful and engaged and we both spoke up when appropriate. Our grandson told us that his classmates thought we were "cool". Our grandson is interested in me, my experiences as an activist and is very proud of me.

HOW TO STEP IN WHEN THERE IS BIAS: EXAMPLE OF AN INTERVENTION

Here is an experience that happened to me in the town I live in, and how I reacted. My intention was to draw an inclusive circle.

In the spirit of collaboration, I approached a man in his thirties who was new to the area and had started a social justice group. I wanted to tell him about a vibrant progressive group that I'm part of -- Traprock. I wanted to meet him.

Before I'd said very much at all, he said, 'You gray-hairs want us to come in and get us to join what you're doing because you're not able to get many people.' I was shocked. No one had ever stigmatized me that way before.

I had to quickly react to what was going on. Staying calm, I tried to give him information that could contradict his assumptions. I said, 'Actually our group is very strong and we have plenty of members. We're not looking for more help, but I wanted you to know about us. We've been doing work in this county since 1978.'

Do you have a story of ageism you've seen in activist circles?

CLOSING

We are passing the power on. We hold a vision of each person making contributions consciously to the long line of people before us and coming after us.

In a song called *Ancestors*, I write about this:

*We are standing on the shoulders of the one who came before us.
They are giving us their courage,
and they say we are glad you're in this world.
May the strength of the ancestors encircle you.
And may this strength stay with you your whole life through.
May the strength of the ancestors encircle you.*

It is available to listen to or download at <http://sarahpirtle.com/hope-sings/ancestors.htm>

“Our society throws away our elders. And they have so much to offer us, so much knowledge about what it is to be human, to grow, suffer, love. The longer you live, the more experience you have. So our elders are like a living library that we can access at any time. In indigenous societies, the young welcome what the elders pass on. They know where the wisdom lies.” --Louise, Concord, MA

May we who are currently the younger ones,
And we who are currently in the middle of the age span,
And we who are the elders
Open to the insights and perspectives of each person
And thereby strength the power we pass on.

7. RESOURCES

Ashton Applewhite wrote this highly recommended book -- *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism*. Networked Books, 2016.

Ann Brenoff writes in her online article, “Ten Microaggressions Older People will Recognize Immediately:”

Complaints about microaggressions — the small everyday slights (intended or otherwise) that harbor an underlying attitude of racism, sexism or homophobia — have been making the rounds of college campuses and workplaces. Microaggressions are things like touching a black man’s dreadlocks or asking an Asian student where she’s *really* from after she tells you “Queens.”

But what’s missing from the national conversation are the microaggressions of ageism — the subtle things people say and do that show a bias against older people. Microaggressions [impact older people in the same ways they do members of racial and ethnic minorities](#) — eroding self-esteem, causing distress and worst of all, closing doors to opportunities that should be open. A joke isn’t funny if it harms people.

Example: **The tone of voice you use.**

Older people are not all hard-of-hearing. You don’t need to shout at them or use the same voice you would use with a small child. No one likes being patronized. According to research reported in the *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, young adults give directions differently to 65-year-olds than they do to 21-year-olds. Specifically, [they speak to older adults more slowly and in higher-pitched voices](#) — two speech patterns associated with being patronizing, notes Prevention. “When adults talk to you the way they do to a two-year-old, they’re presuming you’re not fully competent, and that’s demeaning,” study co-author Jessica Hehman, assistant professor of psychology and director of the Psychology of Aging Lab at the University of Redlands, told Prevention.

RESOURCE LIST of groups directly related to the conference.

The Youth Rise Together meets weekly and was co-founded by Larkin Christie and Gabbi Perry. Their email address is youthrisetogether@gmail.com and their website is youthrisetogether.com.

Ahmad Abojaradeh is the founder and executive director of Life In My Days: starting conversations, creating safe spaces. Here is the website: www.lifeinmydays.com

Seeds of Solidarity Education Center -- seedsofsolidarity.org
Seeds of Solidarity Education Center is non-profit organization in Orange, MA that 'awakens the power of youth, schools, and families to Grow Food Everywhere to transform hunger to health, and create resilient lives and communities.' Co-founder, Deb Habib, is Miriam Habib's daughter whose words are above.

Traprock Center for Peace and Justice (traprock.org)

The Common Threads section of the Traprock website has a free download of another 30-page booklet by Sarah Pirtle: KEEPERS OF THE FIRE -- Dialogue to Change Sexism and Foster Gender Reconciliation. This is the second of the three Dialogue Booklets from Traprock by Sarah Pirtle.