

Learning about Power, Privilege and Oppression

Ageism

Ageism is stereotyping and/or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their age, especially when it exists in an environment of disproportionate positions of power. It may be casual or systemic. The term was coined in 1969 by Robert Neil Butler to describe discrimination against seniors and patterned on sexism and racism. Butler defined "ageism" as a combination of three connected elements: 1) older people, old age, and the aging process; 2) discriminatory practices against older people; and 3) institutional practices and policies that perpetuate stereotypes about elderly people. Most recently, it has been used in regard to prejudice and discrimination against especially adolescents and children, such as denying them certain rights usually reserved for adults such as the right to vote, run for political office, consent or refuse medical treatment, sign contracts, and so forth. This can also include ignoring their ideas because they are considered "too young", or if they should behave in certain ways because of their age. The elderly can be deeply ageist, having internalized a lifetime of negative stereotypes about aging.

Here are some examples:

- Assuming that because someone is young, they are inexperienced and need to be taught or coached.
- Assuming, because a person is old, that their experience and ideas are not relevant.
- Sidelining someone from participating in something solely because of their age.
- Discrimination against the youth in language ("Act your age.", "What do you know, you're just a kid!", "You'll understand it someday, just you wait."), or at work, in school and in their communities.

Additional reading and resources:

- ["Age-ism: Another form of bigotry"](#) Robert N. Butler, MD
- [Free Child Institute for Youth and Social Change](#)
- ["Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America"](#) by Margaret Morganroth Gullette
- AARP, [Disrupt Aging](#)

For more resource and reading, see our [Anti-Oppression Reading and Discussion Resource List](#).