



Age and Youth in Action

CONFRONTING AGEISM

Following the legacy of Maggie Kuhn, Gray Panthers NYC Network hosted an intergenerational Salon to allow others 1) to learn more about us and 2) to begin identifying and developing strategies to CONFRONT AGEISM, here in NYC, and across the globe with those already in the fight. Featured discussants were: Alice Fisher, MSW – Aging Advocate, Ashton Applewhite and Jon Taylor

www.graypanthersnyc.org

April 13, 2014

Below are some reflections on our first Salon – Confronting Ageism

Jack Kupferman – Convener, Gray Panthers, NYC Network

Held at my home, the Salon on Confronting Ageism was a success. With 17 attendees, it was thought provoking, educational, clarifying and will be a spur to action. The remarks of each person brought all to a deeper and nuanced understanding as to why confronting ageism is essential in 2014. Awareness of the issue is still in its infancy.

Confronting ageism is exactly the issue that Gray Panthers had been founded on. Now, it is an opportunity to use that enthusiasm to educate, advocate and make inroads toward addressing the problem.

Alice Fisher, M.A., M.S.W. is an aging Boomer

who works in the office of NYS Senator Liz Krueger, where she developed and oversees “Senator Liz Krueger’s Roundtable for Boomers & Seniors” and counsels the Senator’s senior constituents on issues of housing, healthcare, quality of life, and end of life. A long time social justice advocate, Alice is developing anti-ageism programs and working with a diverse grass roots group in New York City to create awareness of the ageism that permeates our culture. <https://www.facebook.com/ConfrontingAgeism> Email: confrontingageism@gmail.com Phone: 917-439-6083

- *The atmosphere, the food, and the conversation were very enjoyable. Would have liked the conversation to move toward a further understanding of the systemic way that ageism permeates our culture and have people not only identify it*

(although this was a first salon, so maybe identifying it was enough) but how they would set out to change it.

- *I loved the inter-generational mix of attendees; yet, if we are talking about a movement, I think the people who are affected are the ones who have to get it off the ground.*
- *If we--aging boomers and seniors--are the oppressed, then it is our voice that needs to be heard. Only we can give voice to our internalized oppression as well as external oppression. There are inherent problems and conflicts when a group of people speaks FOR another group of people. Of course, we always want allies; but I think that has to come after the language of the oppression is voiced by the group that is oppressed.*

Ashton Applewhite – Author, Speaker, Activist on Ageism in America
www.ThisChairRocks.com www.yoisthisageist.com [facebook.com/ThisChairRocks](https://www.facebook.com/ThisChairRocks)

Kudos for convening a group mixed in age, skills, and approaches to the issue—and on the great food! As you point out, awareness of ageism is still in its infancy. I agree with Alice Fisher that the consciousness-raising groups of the Women's Movement offer the best model, and it's terrific that she's helping groups to start up. I also think we need to develop anti-ageism workshops and, likewise, make the model available to anyone who's interested.

Jon Taylor – Ageism in Graduate School Admission Policies;
Doctoral Student, Age 65

Thank you for the opportunity to speak yesterday. It was a very interesting event. I thought you did a terrific job keeping everyone on track, including me. I confess to being concerned by the exclusive focus some people have on their economic losses. Although the economic impact is important, the issue of ageism is bigger than the pain caused by the financial insecurity of older people. I think the loss to society of the abilities of the aging is also important, as is the emotional toll that it takes on many. When opportunities to work productively are denied to qualified older people, how are we to sustain a belief in self-efficacy? Where will we find meaning in our lives?

*In his dissenting opinion in *Bradley v. Vance*, a US Supreme Court case concerning mandatory retirement, Thurgood Marshall wrote, “this interest [in continued employment] is of special significance to older employees, because [o]nce terminated, the elderly cannot readily find alternative employment. The lack of work is not only economically damaging, but emotionally and physically draining...Ample clinical*

evidence supports the conclusion that mandatory retirement poses a direct threat to the health and life expectancy of the retired person." <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cgi-bin/getcase.pl?navby=case&court=us&vol=440&invol=93>

I continue to think that the unifying theme to the discussion of ageism should be that it involves people being judged as a member of a class, with assumptions, often untrue, about that class, rather than as individuals with their own unique abilities. In that sense, it is no different from other "isms." However, unlike other some other isms, it is not motivated by antipathy. I don't think that young people hate old people as bigots hate blacks, or as homophobes hate gays. Nor do I believe that the people who turned me down for jobs and graduate school were trying to suppress older people, as sexists may do with women.

I think it is also important to realize that our behaviors may be responsible for the attitudes of decision-makers, such as employers. I do believe that many employers who turned me down for jobs did so out of fear that I would be a threatening employee, or that faculty may have been concerned that I would be a disrespectful student. In general, I think we need to be sure that we are good colleagues, an understanding that did not always seem present in yesterday's discussion.

Sister Mary Jo Toll – Global Advocate for Women and Girls,
Representative at the United Nations for the Sisters of Notre Dame

Salon on the Topic of "Confronting Ageism" A very diverse group of activists gathered in the home of Jack Kupferman, on Sunday, April 13, 2014 from 2-6.

The group was inter-generational and the attendees enthusiastically exchanged ideas not only on concerns about overt and subtle bias against older persons. Members of the group also addressed ways in which they could mobilize to educate and change those biases in general conversation, hiring, access to education, medical care and providing a voice for those most vulnerable. Opportunities for involvement included, for example, participation in blogs, political involvement, groups concerned with specific human rights of older persons, and the UN based Committee on Ageing mission visits.

Changing our own language occurred to me since the groups with which I am affiliated never used the term "old" (extremely relative), but rather "elder" (connotes highly respected) or "wisdom women" (we are a community of religious women and the use of this term reflects the rich life experience and broad views of our older Sisters).

Thanks again for a very rich experience. Perhaps others would benefit from this as well.

Wendl Kornfeld - Independent Networking of Elder Resources/NYC;
www.Aging2.com

Dear Jack, Thanks so much for making it possible for me to attend, due to an information link via Aging2.0. The salon concept is an excellent way to bring together diverse people with common interests and goals.

Here are some quick thoughts I want to share with you before Pesach starts:

- *It's invaluable to have younger people attend, for their input, energy and fresh aspects.*
- *Yesterday's salon, for the most part, seemed to be a consensus that there are real ageism issues (young and old) but I'm not sure we got nearer to knowing how to deal with them. I realize this was the first salon, though.*
- *It's often useful to know in advance what you want to come out with — i.e., a decision, gather viewpoints, creative thinking/solutions, build committees, etc.*
- *Distributing written highlights of the meeting to the attendees is also a good way to keep track of what's been discussed, learned, offered, etc. Much easier to follow up, and good ideas don't get forgotten or fall off the radar. It also provides continuity and sense of ownership to the group.*

I look forward to hearing more. Thank you again for blazing the trail!

Allison Cook, MPH – Co-Coordinator of Emerging Leaders in Aging;
Education Associate at the Medicare Rights Center, Age 24
www.emergingaging.com

The salon was a great way to connect with a wide variety of people with similar interests in confronting ageism. It was wonderful to be able to hear the thoughts and opinions of others who have given this issue much thought. However, what I enjoyed most was hearing the ways the participants in the salon plan to confront this issue going forward. It is encouraging to know there are people out there combating ageism and I look forward to helping them continue to do so.