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*Tools for Building Justice*, January, 2003

## **UNIT on Ageism**

### **Session #**

#### **1. Introduction**

Session begins with students examining stereotypes of “old people,” then turning to photos and discussion about ageism. Students finally judge the stereotypes by applying them to elders or ancestors they know who they look up to.

#### **2. Ageism**

After an overview on who older people are, students define ageism and compare it with adultism. From here small groups focus on how ageism operates in different institutions.

#### **3. Institutional Ageism**

Students present their working-group findings on institutionalized ageism and turn to developing scenes of resistance and alliance against ageism.

#### **4. Resistance and Alliance**

Students act out scenes of institutionalized mistreatment and successful resistance and/or alliance against it.

## Session 1 Introduction

### Aims

- To introduce the unit on ageism
- To identify and discuss day-to day conflicts affecting elders

### Skills

Students will:

- Identify stereotypes about older people
- Identify target and nontarget group members in day-today conflicts affecting elders
- Identify positive qualities of elders they know

### Preparation

You will need photographs; students will need materials to write or draw.

### Session Description

Session begins with students examining stereotypes of “old people,” then turning to photos and discussion about ageism. Students finally judge the stereotypes by applying them to elders or ancestors they know and look up to.

### Session Outline

1. To Begin	10 minutes
2. Photographs	10 minutes
3. Elders	25 minutes
4. Conclusion	10 minutes

### Agenda

#### 1. To Begin 10 minutes

Remind students of agreements. Introduce the unit on ageism with the following dyad: Have students pair up and sit facing one another in their dyad. Person A will repeat the word “old” over and over; person B will respond with any word that comes to mind. Allow students to do this for one minute, then switch roles and repeat the process for another minute.

Close by reconvening the students; have volunteers report, first, things they found themselves saying (without reporting what their partners said, as per the agreement of confidentiality), jotting these terms on butcher paper posted on the board; then have them notice the largely negative words and phrases that surface.

Now have them pick the words and phrases that may sometimes be applied to older people. Circle the phrases, and relabel the column of words “Old people.”

- What does this show about how “being old” is valued in mainstream society?

#### 2. Photographs 10 minutes

Distribute the photographs in turn, conducting the following discussion:

### #30 "Age-Job Discrimination"

(without captions)

- What differences can you see between the two nonspeaking women in this photo?
- What's happening in this scene?

(with captions)

- What's happening in this scene?
- Describe the emotion and body language of each of the silent women
- How does each of the silent women feel about what the third woman is saying?
- Are the two women being treated the same, or differently? If differently, what is the "double standard" here? What does "double standard" mean?
- What is the qualification that clinches Lisa's hiring? What is the secret message about "age" that she may be communicating?
- Suppose the two silent women were men instead. What would be the same, and what might be different about this scene? (How might "appearance"—how they look—affect the women's situations here?)
- Suppose Janet objected to the decision and was angry about it. What stereotype might the woman on the right apply to her, openly or silently? What connection might this stereotype have to do with the negative qualities on the board?
- If Janet is being discriminated against as an older woman, how could she resist?
- How could Lisa, as a younger person, be an ally to her?
- How could the woman on the right be an ally to her without being unfair to Lisa?

### #31 "Abusing the Elderly"

- What do you think is happening in this scene?
- How might the three women in the photo be related?
- Describe the facial expressions, clothing and body language of each of the women. What differences do you see?
- What is the woman on the right holding in her hands? What does that have to do with what is happening in the scene?
- Why do you think the woman on the left has bruises on her arms and face?
- Has this scene among the three women happened before among them? Why or why not?
- How does the woman on the left appear to feel about what is happening? What does that say about whether this scene has happened before?
- How does the woman in the middle appear to feel about what is happening? What does that say about whether this scene has happened before?
- Who is being targeted in this scene? Who is doing the targeting?
- If you were the best friend of the older woman, what would you want to say to the woman on the right?
- If you were the best friend of the older woman, what would you want to say to the woman in the middle?

Close the discussion by having students point out what is common to both photographs. Ask, finally:

- How do the photo scenes relate to the list of words and phrases put on the board at the beginning of the period?

### 3. Elders

25 minutes

#### a. Visualization

Have students sit silently and conduct the following visualization:

- Think of a person significantly older than you, an “elder” or an ancestor you know who you look up to and respect. Try to pick someone you know personally; or pick someone from your general background—family, race, ethnicity, and or gender, &c.—that you know of or have read about or been told about. Think of the first person who comes to your mind.
- Spend a few moments looking, in your mind, at their face. What expression do you see? What does their face look like? How can you tell that they’re older?
- Now look at their whole person. Are they standing or sitting or lying down? What is their posture like? How can you tell that they’re older?
- Now think about how they are and who they are in the world. What is it about this person that you love or admire or respect? What is one way that they are in the world that you want to be too?

Bring students slowly out of the visualization for the following.

#### b. Writing/drawing

Conduct a silent writing/drawing exercise for 5-7 minutes. Have students draw a picture of, describe, or write about the person or persons they thought of. Toward the close of the exercise:

- 1) Instruct each student to write down the quality or qualities of this person that she/he most values or wants to have.
- 2) Have each student imagine that her/his elder wants to give her a wish, expressed in a single sentence or message—something the elder would want very much for the student to know, or would wish for the student in her/his life. Write this sentence across the bottom of the page, or on the reverse.

Close by having students return to dyads. Have dyads join into 4-member groups. Have students take turns in their groups sharing their “elders.”

c. Reconvene group. Have students reconsider the derogatory terms for “old” on the board in reference to the discussions they just had about elders.

- What’s the difference?
- Why do you think there’s a difference?

### 4. Conclusion

10 minutes

Close by having students who are willing to put up their portraits/writings of elders, pasting or taping them across the butcher paper of “Old People” stereotypes to make a group mural. Have students volunteer closing reflections.

## Session 2. Ageism

### Aims

- To present basic facts about elder people
- To define the concept of ageism
- To introduce and explore four different types of institutional ageism

### Skills

Students will:

- Understand the concept of ageism
- Investigate forms of institutional ageism in popular culture, the workplace, healthcare and the family
- Prepare presentations on institutional ageism

### Preparation

Prepare statistical items from #2 as separate posters. Select student volunteers in advance to review and present the posters. For small group work you will need the appropriate page of instructions for each group, prepared note cards, markers and butcher paper, and a stack of fashion magazines with images of both women and men, the kind easily found in a convenience store or newsstand. Finally, you will need copies of the handout for each of your students. You will need to prepare the poster for working group 4 on elder abuse in advance.

### Session Description

After an overview on who older people are, students define ageism and compare it with adultism. From here small groups focus on how ageism operates in different institutions.

### Session Outline

1. To Begin	5 minutes
2. Who are older people?	10 minutes
3. Ageism and Adultism	5 minutes
4. Institutional Ageism: Pedestrians	10 minutes
5. Working Groups on Ageism	20 minutes
6. Conclusion	5 minutes

### Agenda

#### 1. To Begin 5 minutes

Remind students of agreements. Briefly review the last session, reminding students especially of the stereotypes about “old people.” Explain that in this session students will look at the realities of discrimination against elder people—ageism.

#### 2. Who are older people? 10 minutes

Explain that you will use the terms “elder,” “older” and “aging/aged” to refer for the most part to people 65 years or older, but also more loosely to people approaching these ages. Compared to some of the other “isms” you might discuss, there are rarely members of this “target group” in a

school setting to speak for themselves. So the class will begin by reviewing one report of statistics about elder people.<sup>1</sup>

Have students volunteer to present each of the following statistical findings, prepared on posters, about elders 65 years and older in the United States, prepared in separate poster format; for each of the categories, ask students to think for a moment of the stereotypes in the category commonly applied to elders. As presenters finish, have them post signs in one part of the room.

**a. Physical Health Poster:**

**Physical Health**

- 4 out of 5 elders are healthy enough to do their normal activities. Only 5 percent of those 65 and over are institutionalized.
- While more persons over 65 have chronic illnesses that limit their activity than do younger persons, elders actually have fewer acute illnesses than do younger persons, have fewer injuries in the home, and fewer highway accidents than younger persons.
- The majority of persons past 65 continue to have both interest in and capacity for sexual relations, usually into the seventies and eighties for healthy couples.

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<sup>1</sup> Material adapted and quoted from Palmore, *Ageism: Negative and Positive* (1990, p. 18-25) summarized in "Ageism," Barrie M. Robinson, School of Social Work, UC Berkeley 1994, on the Internet School Library Media Center (ISLMC) Ageism Page.

**b. Mental Health Poster:**

**Mental Health**

- There is little or no decline in everyday short-term memory among normal elders. Less than 1 out of 5 elders have long-term memory losses—cannot remember such things as the past President of the United States; their correct age, birth date, telephone number, mother's maiden name, or address. The majority does not have serious memory defects. Significant learning and memory problems are due to illness, not to age.
- Major depression is less prevalent among the older than among younger people. However, of the various mental illnesses depression is one of the most common among the elderly. It has been estimated that from 30% to 60% of the elderly population experience at least one episode of depression severe enough to interfere with daily functioning. This, along with the fact that the rate of elderly suicide is the highest of all age groups, makes depression a significant issue.
- Most elders retain their normal mental abilities, including the ability to learn and remember. Reaction time tends to slow down in old age and it may take somewhat longer to learn something. But much of the difference between older and younger persons can be explained by other things: illness, motivation, learning style, lack of practice, or amount of education. When these are taken into account, age does not influence learning ability.
- Mental illness is not common among elders. Only about 2 percent of persons 65 and over are institutionalized for psychiatric illness. Less than 10 percent have significant or severe mental illness, and another 10 to 32 percent have mild to moderate mental impairment; but the majority is without impairment. The rate of mental illness among the elderly is less than that of younger persons.

**c. Work Poster:**

**Work**

- The majority of older workers can work as effectively as younger workers.
- Studies of employed older people under actual working conditions generally show that they perform as well as, if not better than, younger workers on most measures.
- Consistency of output tends to increase with age, and older workers have less job turnover, fewer accidents, and less absenteeism than younger workers.

**d. Social relationships Poster:**

**Social Relationships**

The majority of elders are not socially isolated. About two-thirds live with their spouse or family. Only about 4 percent of elders are extremely isolated, and most of these have had lifelong histories of isolation.

#### e. Poverty Poster:

##### Poverty

In 1989 1 in 10 of the elderly had incomes below the poverty level and 27% were near the level. Certain groups of elderly experience very high rates of poverty. These include widowed elderly women (21%), African-American elders (31%), and African-American elder women, aged 72 or older living alone (64%).

Close with a dyad: have students reflect on the most surprising statistic, if any, and what this brings to mind about elders they know.

### 3. Ageism and Adultism

5 minutes

Write the word “ageism” on the board and ask for definitions. As part of the discussion, include the following points:

- a) Like the other isms, ageism is an oppression in which:  
prejudice + power over = ism
- b) A nontarget group, adults younger than elders, has privilege power over a target group, the elderly, and uses that privilege and power to control them—hurt them, make them feel bad, or get something from them—or receive better treatment and more resources than them.
- c) Like adultism and unlike racism, sexism or other isms, ageism is a category that you move into or out of over your life. No one is exempt from being young; no one is exempt from becoming old unless she/he dies at an early age.
- d) The nontarget group in ageism is adults younger than elders, roughly adults in their 20s, 30s, 40s, or 50s. Young people can of course stereotype, mistreat or hurt elders, but it is adults—those who are younger than elders and older than young people—who in the mainstream United States have privileges and resources that elders lack.
- e) Ageism is especially complex for young people who have to deal with adultism; sometimes the adultism they experience is at the hands of elders. Likewise, elders may experience mistreatment from young people and use this mistreatment to justify adultist stereotypes and mistreatment of young people. One hurtful result is that young people and elders have sometimes been pitted against each other in a so-called “generation gap” or conflict for, e.g., government funding.
- f) This generational relationship also means that elders and youth are naturally, and have traditionally been, powerful allies to each other; older people mentor and support younger people, while young people have worked to honor and take care of elders.

### 4. Institutional Ageism: Pedestrians

10 minutes



Explain that for the rest of the session students will be looking at institutional ageism—how old people are unequally treated in institutions—beginning with the following example:

### **Red Light, Green Light**

Have students set up two empty chairs, one at either end of the classroom, with a clear path in between. Have five students volunteer to enact the following exercise.

Explain the exercise to the entire class before it begins.

Student A has a watch and stands at one of the chairs; students B and C at the other chair.

Students D and E stand midway between the chairs.

Have student B walk at a normal pace from her chair to student A's chair, while student A times her. Have student B return to the starting place, while student A reports the time it took her to walk across.

The scene is an urban or suburban crosswalk at an intersection on a one-way street.

- Student A is a “walk/don't walk” sign.
- B continues to play herself.
- C plays an elder with more limited mobility; in the time it takes B to take 2 steps, C can only take one step.
- D and E are motorists waiting more or less patiently at the two lanes going in the same direction at the intersection; when the light changes, they will drive forward across the crosswalk that B and C are traversing.

A gives the command “Walk” and repeats it over and over, while timing; B and C begin to walk across as D and E wait, more or less patiently, for the light to change.

When the time for “normal” walking across is completed, A begins to chant “Don't Walk,” and D and E “drive” forward, trying not to hit C; they are allowed to yell at or make comments to C about being in the way, age, &c.

Stop the exercise. Ask students to point out how the situation has been set up institutionally to discriminate against elders. Ask:

- How can you tell that elders did not help to design the traffic situation?
- Who did the drivers blame for the traffic situation?
- How do elders become “invisible” in this set up?

### **5. Working Groups on Ageism**

**20 minutes**

Explain that students will now form working groups to look at how elders are affected in four institutions: the media, the workplace, the health system, and the family. Each group will analyze how elders may be treated and mistreated in this institution, and present their findings to the class. In the next session, the working group will develop a roleplay, a scene in which ageism is happening, with a resolution in which elders and younger allies interrupt the mistreatment.

Divide students into 4 working groups, distributing appropriate instructions and materials to each. Each group should have two students who take turns reading instructions and facilitating the group's discussion. Circulate from group to group to assist as they prepare presentations.

Allow 15-20 minutes, and give students a 5-minute warning in order for them to begin to prepare their presentations for as much of the work as they have completed.

## **6. Conclusion**

**5 minutes**

Reconvene the class; explain that groups will present at the beginning of the next session. For a few moments, have students report insights or conclusions they have drawn from working in their groups. Distribute handout ("10 concepts on aging") for review before the next session.

## **Working Group 1: Media**

### **The Young and the Beautiful**

Materials:

- fashion magazines with images of women and men to the group
- butcher paper, tape and markers.

Instructions:

#### **A.**

1. The first task is, in five minutes time, to examine magazines and cut or tear out as many ad images of people under age 30 as you can find.
2. At the end of 5 minutes, stop. On butcher paper, write down words to describe the images you have collected, answering the questions:
  - What do the figures look like?
  - What are they doing? Active, inactive?
  - How can you tell that the models are under 30?
  - What are the messages you can find, open or subtle, about “being young”?
  - Any connections with the stereotype of “beautiful people”?

#### **B.**

1. Now, return to the magazines. Find and collect ad images of people who are depicted as “elder,” roughly ages 55-60 and older.
2. At the end of 5 minutes, stop and discuss these questions:
  - Is it harder to find ads depicting older people? Why?
  - If you found fewer ads, what is the implied message about “being older”?
  - What do the figures look like?
  - What are they doing? Active, inactive?
  - How many of the ads are explicitly about being older, e.g. medications, retirement plans, &c.? How many are about fashionable clothes? What is the difference?
  - Any connections with the stereotype of “beautiful people”?
  - Thinking about how adults and elders are depicted, who are more likely to be shown in “normal” roles, in which their age is not a factor, and who are more likely to be shown in roles where their age is a factor?
  - Finally, then how are elders made invisible in this process?

#### **C.**

You have been looking at how adults and elders are depicted in magazines. Now use the above questions to discuss the relative frequency of adults and elders in normal roles in the following media. Make one butcher paper poster for each, labeled with the appropriate medium. On each poster, make two columns, “elder” and “adult,” and write into the poster how frequently each group is depicted, examples of how they’re depicted, and the messages about each that are communicated:

- TV: news shows, talk shows, sitcoms, daytime soaps, cartoons, primetime TV, ads
- Radio: talk shows, news shows, DJs, ads

- Movies: blockbusters, action, romance, comedy, horror, “teen” movies, Oscar winners
- Billboards and bus ads
- Internet: ads, computer games
- Newspapers: ads, cartoons

**D.**

1. With the materials you have gathered, make two collages: one of the “young and the beautiful ” and one of elders.
2. Prepare a 5-minute formal presentation on your discussion.
  - Two group members present the collages and explain what they show.
  - Different members of the group speak to each of the other 6 posters

## **Working Group 2: Workplace**

### **It's Just Business**

#### Materials

- Poster c, “work” from the first part of the class
- Butcher paper and markers
- Note cards or page with scenarios

#### Instructions:

##### **A.**

As a backdrop for the following, review the poster on findings about older workers.

*The majority of older workers can work as effectively as younger workers. Studies of employed older people under actual working conditions generally show that they perform as well as, if not better than, younger workers on most measures. Consistency of output tends to increase with age, and older workers have less job turnover, fewer accidents, and less absenteeism than younger workers.*

##### **B.<sup>2</sup>**

Have group members take turns reading the following bulleted items about older people and work:

#### **Background on Aging and work**

- Financial need and wanting to have work to do send many early retirees back to work.
- Many older Americans, however, can't find a job or are too discouraged to try. About 667,000 people 55 and older were unemployed in 1993; about half had been out of work for 15 weeks or more.
- Over a half million workers aged 55 and older lost jobs in a single year because of company closings, insufficient work, or abolished positions or shifts. Older workers (like much younger workers) are at particular risk of losing a job.
- The firing rate is about the same in all age groups--around 3 percent--but many more older workers than younger ones remain unemployed or out of the labor force
- Stressful conditions in the workplace are projected to continue during a time when the number of workers 55 and older will jump from 16 million in 1996 to 22 million in 2005, and rise even higher with the aging of the baby boomers.
- How companies handle older workers:
  - Only 1 in 8 companies sees an urgent need to respond to the aging of the work force.
  - Only 1 in 3 offers older workers the chance to transfer to jobs with less responsibility and
  - Only 1 in 5 offers phased retirement.
- Hiring executives rate older workers very highly, but believe younger managers "do not really want older employees no matter how good their skills, 'so what's the point of sending them an older worker to interview?'"

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<sup>2</sup> Background facts, some scenarios and related statistics from “Age discrimination: a pervasive, damaging influence” in AofA Fact Sheets, on the Administration on Aging ElderPage.

- Younger company managers see older workers as:
  - Like their parents, and they don't want to "boss" their parents
  - knowing more than younger workers do and making them look bad, less competent;
  - hard to relate to;
  - not part of 'my generation,' 'my culture'; and
  - 'inflexible, unwilling to change.'
- In 1993 Monsanto younger executives fired 66 sales managers, 59 of whom were 40 or older. (Forty-three of the people fired sued Monsanto for age discrimination and won.)

### C.

Distribute cards of scenarios. Make two posters, each with the overall heading "It's Just Business": poster A labeled "surface reasons," and poster B labeled "real reasons." Explain that in each scenario, a supervisor or boss is going to ignore, pass over or get rid of an older worker. For each scenario:

- 1 person reads the scenario
- 1 person acts as voice A: the speaker who explains to the worker why she/he is being ignored, passed over or gotten rid of, without admitting to "discrimination"—giving "surface reasons."
- 1 person acts as voice B: the speaker who gives the real reasons behind each of the explanations speaker A gives.
- 1 person writes voice A's points on poster A, and voice B's responses on poster B.

Take turns reading each of the following scenarios, giving "surface reasons" and "real reasons." Complete only as many as you have time to do before preparing your presentation.

Scenario 1: The producer for Eyewitness News is looking for a female co-anchor. An older experienced woman and a younger, "prettier" but much less experienced woman have applied.

Scenario 2: The corporation department boss is offering specialized computer training to a limited number of employees and has to choose between younger and older workers

Scenario 3: The 62-year-old retired worker can't make it on her pension and has to go back to work. She has lots of experience and could take the (high-paying, high-skilled) executive secretary job, but the boss wants her to apply for the (low-paying, low-skilled) receptionist position.

Scenario 4: The new manager is younger than several of the people he supervises; he has new job openings and has a choice between hiring people older or the same age or younger than him.

Scenario 5: The legal team moves a long-time, older partner to a smaller office when he passes 60.

Scenario 6: The company is going to "downsize": it's making some of its jobs automated and making its permanent workers part-time or contract so it won't have to pay for benefits, holidays

or retirement, and is looking to open up its positions for younger applicants willing to work for less pay. The CEO explains to older employees that they will have to re-apply for their jobs.

Scenario 7: The new boss wants to get rid of the 60-year-old secretary he inherits, but knows that it's age discrimination to fire her and hire a younger person.

At the end of the last scenario, take a few minutes to discuss the effects on older workers of the above scenarios: how might they come to feel about themselves? About their abilities? About their futures?

With the posters you have made, prepare a 5-minute formal presentation on your discussion. One group member will summarize the background fact sheet. Two will explain that the group explored different scenarios of older workers being discriminated against (without going into the details of the scenarios), and present and explain the posters of "reasons" and "real reasons" for discrimination. The last person will summarize the closing discussion about how older workers might be affected.

## **Working Group 3: Health and the healthcare system Over the Hill**

Materials: Markers and butcher paper.

Instructions:

### **A.**<sup>3</sup>

Prepare butcher paper with the overall heading, “Over the Hill,” and two columns labeled “action” and “assumptions.”

For the following exercise, one student speaks as an older person and reads off an “action” or behavior she/he performs as an older person; the other students act as adults commenting on the older person, making assumptions or assigning stereotypes about her/him as an old person based on the stated behavior; one student fills out columns on butcher paper.

Actions:

- falter for a moment because I’m unsure of myself
- forget someone’s name
- miss a word or fail to hear a sentence
- complain about aches and pains
- express some pessimism—negative feelings or a feeling of hopelessness about my life, another person’s life, or world events
- talk about being sexually attracted to someone
- worry about being dependent and helpless

### **B.**

Look over the list of stereotypes/assumptions you have produced:

- What differences would it make if the person performing the actions were an adult, young adult, or young person?
- If there are differences, what is the overall picture of older people and “normal” functioning that these assumptions paint?

### **C.**

Now have each of the following characters be represented by a different student. As that character, using the assumptions/stereotypes to justify your actions, state how you might (mis)treat the older person:

- Family member caring for elder person at home
- Emergency room doctor dealing with older person needing ongoing chronic care as patient
- Attendant caring for older person in nursing home
- Insurance claims representative deciding whether to approve expensive medical treatment

Have one student record your responses on a second butcher paper, headed “(mis)treatment.”

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<sup>3</sup> Stereotype categories adapted from Edith Stein, quoted in Palmore, *Ageism: Negative and Positive* (1990) and summarized in “Ageism,” Barrie M. Robinson, School of Social Work, UC Berkeley 1994, on the Internet School Library Media Center (ISLMC) Ageism Page.



**D.**

Prepare a 5-minute formal presentation on your discussion.

- Two group members present the first butcher paper and explain what it shows.
- One group member presents the second butcher paper and explains what it shows.

## Working Group 4: Elder Abuse

Materials: Markers and butcher paper, and easy access to “Our Elders” drawings made in the last session.

Instructions: For the following, have two students take turns drawing and recording everyone’s responses on butcher paper.

### A.

Label butcher paper A the “Safety Net.” Draw a small heart in the center with the label “elder.”

Draw a word map of all the different kinds of people and institutions you can think of that support or take care of older people in the United States. Include “Self” and “Family” among the people or institutions. Draw lines to attach these words to the heart.

- In the United States, when other kinds of institutions or people—the “safety net”—can’t or won’t help, have their budgets cut or their resources are limited, which person/group is most likely to be expected to support the elder person, besides that person her/himself?
- What effects does the failure of the “safety net” have on the elder person?
- What pressures to care for that person are likely to fall on family members? Make a word map within the word map, writing the kinds of pressures and attaching them to “Family.”
- Which family members are most likely to be expected to help? List these members under “Family.”

### B.

Draw a heart on butcher paper B with the label “elder.”

Remembering the heart exercise about how people are born, their qualities, how they experience mistreatment and how they resist, complete the following.

Write into the heart the positive qualities you know to be true about elders you know. Refer to any qualities you remember from the drawings students made in the last session.

### C.

Under the heading “Elder Rights,” make three columns on a butcher paper C, headed “body,” “feelings/emotions” and “mind/thinking/speech.”<sup>4</sup> Write responses to the following in each of the columns.

- What rights should an elder have to protect and care for her/his body, and to keep her/his body well nourished and healthy? What control should she/he have over how her/his body is touched?
- What rights should an elder have to have her/his feelings protected and respected?
- What rights should an elder have for its mind or thinking or speech to be protected and respected?

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<sup>4</sup> adapted from Vasquez, Myhand and Creighton, *Making Allies, Making Friends*, Hunter House, Alameda, 2002.

## ELDER RIGHTS

BODY	FEELINGS	MIND
Nurturing food Regular exercise Touched only with permission No physical abuse or constraint	Listened to Respected Not forced to take emotion-controlling drugs without informed consent No emotional abuse	Think and talk freely Continue education Listened to Talked to Not ridiculed or silenced

Going back to the “Elder heart” drawing, brainstorm all of the ways you know or have heard of that elders’ “hearts”—their bodies, feelings, or minds—have been mistreated, abused or exploited by other people, or their rights have been limited. Use one color marker to represent *family members’* mistreatment.

Write responses around the outside of the heart, filling up space. Include examples of:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial or material exploitation
- Abandonment
- Neglect

After you have made a list, use another marker to brainstorm ways *the safety net outside of the family* may fail or abuse elders.

Finally, on the reverse side of the poster, make a list of ways elders may *internalize* mistreatment with:

- self-abuse or
- self-neglect.

### D.

Finally, review the following statistics, already prepared on butcher paper:

### **Elder abuse<sup>1</sup>**

- Over half a million elders aged 60 and over living at home experienced abuse, neglect, and/or self-neglect in a one-year period, roughly 4-6% of the adult population;
- Almost 1 in 6 new incidents of abuse, neglect, and/or self-neglect are reported;
- In nursing homes, 36 percent of the nursing and aide staff reported having seen at least one incident of physical abuse by other staff members in the preceding year, and 10 percent admitted having committed at least one act of physical abuse themselves. At least one incident of psychological abuse against a resident had been observed by 81 percent of the sample in the preceding year, and 40 percent admitted to having committed such an act;
- Elders aged 80 years and older suffered abuse and neglect 2 to 3 times their proportion of the older population;
- Among known perpetrators of abuse and neglect, the perpetrator was a family member in 90 percent of cases. 2/3 of the perpetrators were adult children or spouses; and
- Neither caregiver stress levels nor elders' levels of dependence may be core factors leading to elder abuse. The long-term or prior-to-abuse nature of the relationship between the abuser and the elder may be the important factor, including the dependency of the abuser on the victim; the mental state of the abuser, which may include emotional, psychiatric, and substance abuse problems; and lack of external social supports for the victim.

### **E.**

Prepare a 5-minute formal presentation on your discussion, with one group member presenting each of the four posters you have created.

## Handout - 10 Concepts on Aging<sup>5</sup>

1. *Aging is Universal.* It is common to every population and is not just a modern-day phenomenon.
2. *Aging is Normal.* “Growing up” is spoken of with respect; “growing old” with fear. This fear comes from the stereotyped picture of aging as a loss of faculties, beauty, energy, and memory.
3. *Aging is Variable.* Each person ages in a unique way. The state of later life develops from former personal life patterns and treatment by the society.
4. *Dying is Normal and Inevitable.* One can live a full, satisfying life, and also anticipate and prepare for death as a meaningful closure of life.
5. *Illness isn't a Necessary Part of Aging.* People can and should prepare for healthy old age through improved living habits in early and middle years.
6. *Older People Really Represent Three Generations.* The group known as the “aged” covers the years 65-112 and above, representing two, and often three, generations and may include parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. No other age group includes such diversity.
7. *Older People Can and Do Learn.* Capacity to learn new things and re-learn the old is not necessarily diminished by old age. Learning patterns may change from youth and the speed of learning may slow, but learning ability is not restricted by years.
8. *Older People Can and Do Change.* As one grows older, many adjustments become necessary. Mates die, housing situations change, new activities are developed, and new friendships established.
9. *Older People Want to Remain Self-directed.* Where dependency on others for decision-making exists among older people, it has often been learned as a direct result of loss of a sense of purpose and self-respect. To prevent this loss when older adults undergo life changes, their self-direction and sense of control should be maintained as much as possible, even if they become dependent in some ways.
10. *Older People are Vital Human Beings.* The need for physical help in crossing the street does not mean that the person does not know where she/he is going. Physical limitations do not imply mental impairment; physical or mental impairments don't mean that elders can't or are not entitled to live full lives.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from *Elder Abuse Prevention Speaker's Kit*, National Association of Adult Protective Services Administrators, adapted from the Texas Department on Aging, Ombudsman Certification Manual

## Session 3 Institutional Ageism

### Aims

- To identify facets of institutional ageism in popular culture, the workplace, health care and the family
- To identify forms of resistance and alliance against ageism

### Skills

Students will:

- Make presentations of four different kinds of institutional ageism and their effects on elders.
- Apply the concepts of resistance and alliance to ageism
- Prepare roleplays depicting successful resistance and/or alliance against ageism

### Preparation

Working groups will need the posters they prepared in the last session. Arrange a clearly visible wall-space on which to post and refer to the posters.

### Session Description

Students present their working-group findings on institutionalized ageism, and turn to developing scenes of resistance and alliance against ageism.

### Session Outline

1. To Begin	10 minutes
2. Presentations on Institutional Ageism	20 minutes
3. Resistance and Alliance	10 minutes
4. Interventions	10 minutes
5. Conclusion	5 minutes

### Agenda

#### 1. To Begin 10 minutes

For a few moments have students recount and comment upon the handout “10 concepts on Aging.” Then return students to their working groups for 5 minutes to prepare for their presentations

#### 2. Presentations on Institutional Ageism 20 minutes

Have working groups take turns making their presentations, mounting their posters on a prepared wall-space. For each of the first two presentations, follow the presentation with a few moments of dialogue, with questions and additional comments from other students.

After two presentations, have students pair up for a dyad on what they’re thinking about. Then return to the remaining two presentations.

Close the final presentation with an additional dyad.

#### 3. Resistance and Alliance 10 minutes

a. Review the concept of target groups resisting mistreatment. Have students think about how, on this issue, elders have individually and collectively resisted mistreatment. If easy and available examples are not forthcoming, ask:

- Why don't we have a lot of stories about elders' resistance? (Ans: *part of the oppression of elders is their invisibility in the society, so it makes sense that the histories of resistance might be hidden from us.*)

b. Review the concept of nontarget groups and other target groups being allies to this target group—how adults and young people can be allies to elders. Ask:

- How can adults be allies to elders? What would NOT be helpful from adults? What would get in their way?
- How can young people be allies to elders? What would NOT be helpful from young people? What might get in their way?

#### **4. Interventions**

**10 minutes**

Return students to their working groups. The task of each group is to prepare a roleplay depicting a scene of intervening against mistreatment of elders in their particular institution. The guidelines for the roleplay are:

- The scene should show an interaction in which an elder is being discriminated against or mistreated. It may be one of the scenarios already suggested for several of the groups, or one that students come up with, especially if it involves a scene someone in the group has witnessed.
- The scene should conclude with a successful intervention against the mistreatment: resistance by the elder, or alliance from younger adults or youth, or both.
- The actor(s) playing the elder must avoid acting out the stereotype of an older person (e.g. “doddering”)
- Any actions of alliance must avoid patronizing the elder, or treating her/him as a “victim” or “child.”
- The roleplay should be brief (2-3 minutes), and actors should agree on a closing line.
- Everyone in the group should have a part in the scene.
- Additionally, one student from the group will introduce the roleplay, setting the scene.
- As an option, students can stage an interactive roleplay. In an interactive roleplay, the scene is begun and continues for 1-2 minutes. Then anyone in the class who wants to take on one of the roles comes forward; when permitted, she/he taps the shoulder of the appropriate actor and takes their place. One student from the working group guides the process, placing the new actors as they come up.

Circulate among groups to assist with applying the guidelines.

#### **5. Conclusion**

**5 minutes**

Reconvene the class; take a few moments for students to report on how their roleplays are coming.

## Session 4 Resistance and Alliance

### Aims

- To identify practical interventions against ageism

### Skills

Students will:

- Conduct roleplays depicting successful resistance and/or alliance against ageism

### Preparation

### Session Description

Students act out scenes of institutionalized mistreatment and successful resistance and/or alliance against it.

### Session Outline

- |                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| 1. To Begin      | 10 minutes |
| 2. The roleplays | 30 minutes |
| 3. Conclusion    | 15 minutes |

### Agenda

#### 1. To Begin 10 minutes

Have students review the last session; review the roleplay guidelines from the last session and reconvene roleplay groups for 5 minutes to prepare for roleplay presentations.

#### 2. Roleplays 30 minutes

Have groups number off to determine the order of presentations and begin with the first group. Each presentation should proceed in the following order:

- a) A group member states the overall theme of the roleplay and the scene
- b) Roleplayers perform the scene (if the roleplay is interactive, group members facilitate the process of students taking each other's places in the roles), closing with the agreed-upon line
- c) Roleplayers stay in position. Group members facilitate the class discussion addressing the following questions (put questions on the board):
  - What happened in this scene—what was the mistreatment?
  - What was the intervention—the resistance and/or alliance?
  - How else could the people in the roleplay have resisted and or been allies to stop the mistreatment?
- d) Close with applause for the group.

After the second presentation conduct a dyad to enable students to reflect on what they have seen so far.

#### 3. Conclusion 10 minutes

Reconvene students with writing materials. Remind them of the “Elders” exercise in session 1. In that exercise each student thought about and wrote or made drawings about an elder she/he



knew, along with a wish that elder had for the student. Return to and continue that exercise here by having each student write a message to her/his elder, stating a commitment she/he is making to be an ally to that elder. Remind students that as an act of alliance the commitment has to be realistic and doable; it may or may not be something the student does directly with her/his elder.

Close by having students volunteer to share their commitments and closing reflections.

#### **4. Follow up Sessions/Activities**

#### **Assessment/Evaluation**