

Appendix 15U

Information on Internalized Ageism

People of all ages in American society hold deeply internalized attitudes and beliefs that a person's worth rests on their productivity and ability to maintain independence (Chabot, 2000). These attitudes affect both young people and elders. For example, in awarding damages for wrongful death, the age and productivity of the person is a major factor. Using midlife as the standard, older people and young people are generally valued as worth less. Indeed, aging well is to be as active and financially well off as one was in midlife (assuming one is at least middle class.) The terms "successful" or "productive" aging are often used to gauge the relative value of one's life in old age, while criteria such as wisdom, happiness, and quality of relationships, valued in some other cultures, are ignored.

It is interesting to note that Chinese culture has a generally positive view of aging and that older Chinese have a higher memory performance than older Americans, perhaps because of our "internalized" ageism (Levy & Langer, 1994 as cited in Kite & Wagner, 2002). Infanticide is still practiced in certain parts of the world (Kohl, 1978), and some ethicists and physicians in Boston, Massachusetts expressed concern that a test profiled by the *Boston Globe* in June 2005 "could lead to sex-selective abortion" (www.kaisernetwork.org/dailyreports.repro). A California gynecologist has been asked to defend his practice of advertising a fetus sex determination procedure in certain communities where women have been known to seek an abortion after being told that they carried a female fetus.

While we may value old people such as grandmothers who are caregivers or "elder statesmen" who are role models, we often share negative attitudes towards "senior citizens" (Brewer & Lui 1984) and internalize beliefs that the old cannot be beautiful, sexual or desirable. We routinely use language that values young people such as the common phrases: "It keeps me young," "I don't feel a day over 40," and "My, you look so young."

Billions are spent annually on anti-aging from hair color products to botox treatments. Communication with the elderly is often patronizing, depersonalized, and

disrespectful, reflecting this devaluing of old age (Williams & Giles, 1998). Baby talk, according to Arluke and Levin (1984), “creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in that older people come to accept and believe that they are no longer independent, contributing adults and that they must assume a passive, dependent role (Butler, Lewis, & Sunderland, 1991). Exposure to negative stereotypes that devalue their lives can even lead old people to decline life-sustaining or life-extending treatments and procedures.

Possible lists:

Ageism: Internalized Subordination	Ageism: Internalized Domination
Worth as a person/self-concept is negatively affected	Belief that elders are not worth much to society, that non-elder adults have more to contribute to society than do elders
Belief that old people are not desirable sexually or otherwise	Belief that elders are unproductive and non-elder adults are the productive members of society whose knowledge is more important / up-to-date / valuable
Loss of confidence in their ability to act independently (learned helplessness)	Belief that elders are not desirable sexually or otherwise and that their sexuality is inappropriate, quaint, funny
The assumption that certain health conditions are inevitable byproducts of aging resulting in not seeking treatment	
Cycle of dependence	

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