

Ageism Hurts!

NLPEA

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Ageism – the invisible epidemic...

- “...age above all types of diversity, occupies the front row in attracting socially sanctioned ridicule, prejudice, and bias...” (Kane, 2004)



"Just when it seems sexism is phasing out, ageism is phasing in."

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'Ageism' widespread in Canada

– CTV News September 2012

- “So many Canadians look down on seniors that ageism has become the most tolerated form of social discrimination in Canada, a new survey concludes.”**

Ageism in Canada

- **79% Canadians agree that seniors 75 and older are seen as less important and are more often ignored than younger generations in society**
- **71% agree that Canadian society values younger generations more than older generations**
- **63% seniors 66 years of age and older say they have been treated unfairly or differently because of their age**

Cont'd

- **51% of Canadians say ageism is the most tolerated social prejudice when compared to gender- or race-based discrimination**
- **35% Canadians admit they have treated someone differently because of their age**

Ageism and Elder Abuse

- Attitude change is a key aim in the prevention of elder abuse.
- Wolf (1999) found higher levels of reporting in communities that had higher levels of training e.g. Senior Behaviour Inventory

Elder Abuse Attitude Test (Stones & Pittman, 1995)

- Asks respondent (before and after intervention) to determine on scale of “not abusive” to “very severely abusive”:
 - Steals something a senior values
 - Pushes or shoves a senior
 - Lies to a senior in a harmful way
 - Withholds information that may be valuable to a seniors
 - Tells a seniors that person is “too much trouble”
 - Fails to provide proper nutrition
 - Disbelieves a senior claiming to be abused – without checking

Ageism among health professionals:

- Tends to be higher than in the general population
 - Emphasis on pathology in education
 - Death avoidance
 - Biased experience of aging

As a result...

- View elders as resistant, rigid, demanding uninteresting
- Narrow assessments, medical solutions for non-medical needs
- Low goal formulation (disabling vs enabling)
- Psychological disorders are misdiagnosed as physical ailments

Cont'd

- U.S. study found 30-50% of physicians limit number of older adults in to their practices
- Older adults receive less medical information
- Communication is oriented to third party
- Problems are dismissed as part of 'normal' aging e.g. incontinence, pain control

What do we know about aging?

Activity Limitation

What is the proportion of persons 75+ who report activity limitations?

- 84%
- 72%
- 56%
- 24%

Requiring Help At Home

What proportion of persons 65+ require assistance with domestic activities?

- 66%
- 54%
- 35%
- 23%

Computer Literate

What is the proportion of persons 65+ who are online?

- 45%
- 31%
- 13%
- 5%

Living in Nursing Homes

What proportion of persons 65+ live in nursing homes?

- 30%
- 24%
- 12%
- 5%

Care Provided by Informal Sector

This was the amount of care estimated to have been provided by unpaid caregivers in 2009:

- 23 billion dollars
- 15 billion dollars
- 10 million dollars

Sexuality and Aging

In one study, this is the percentage of persons aged 57-85 who described themselves as sexually active:

- 75%
- 50%
- 25%
- 5%

Ageism

What is the proportion of persons 65+ who report that they have been discriminated against because of age?

- 63%
- 45%
- 29%
- 11%

- Most seniors are relatively active and independent.
- Most seniors live in their homes and communities.



- Much care that is provided to seniors is provided by unpaid caregivers.
- Many older people continue to engage in sexual activity.
- Most seniors have experienced discrimination because of their age – ageism.

What is ageism?

Simply stated...

- Ageism is ...thinking or behaving in a negative manner about the process of becoming old or about old people.
- Ageism is a social attitude or stereotype.

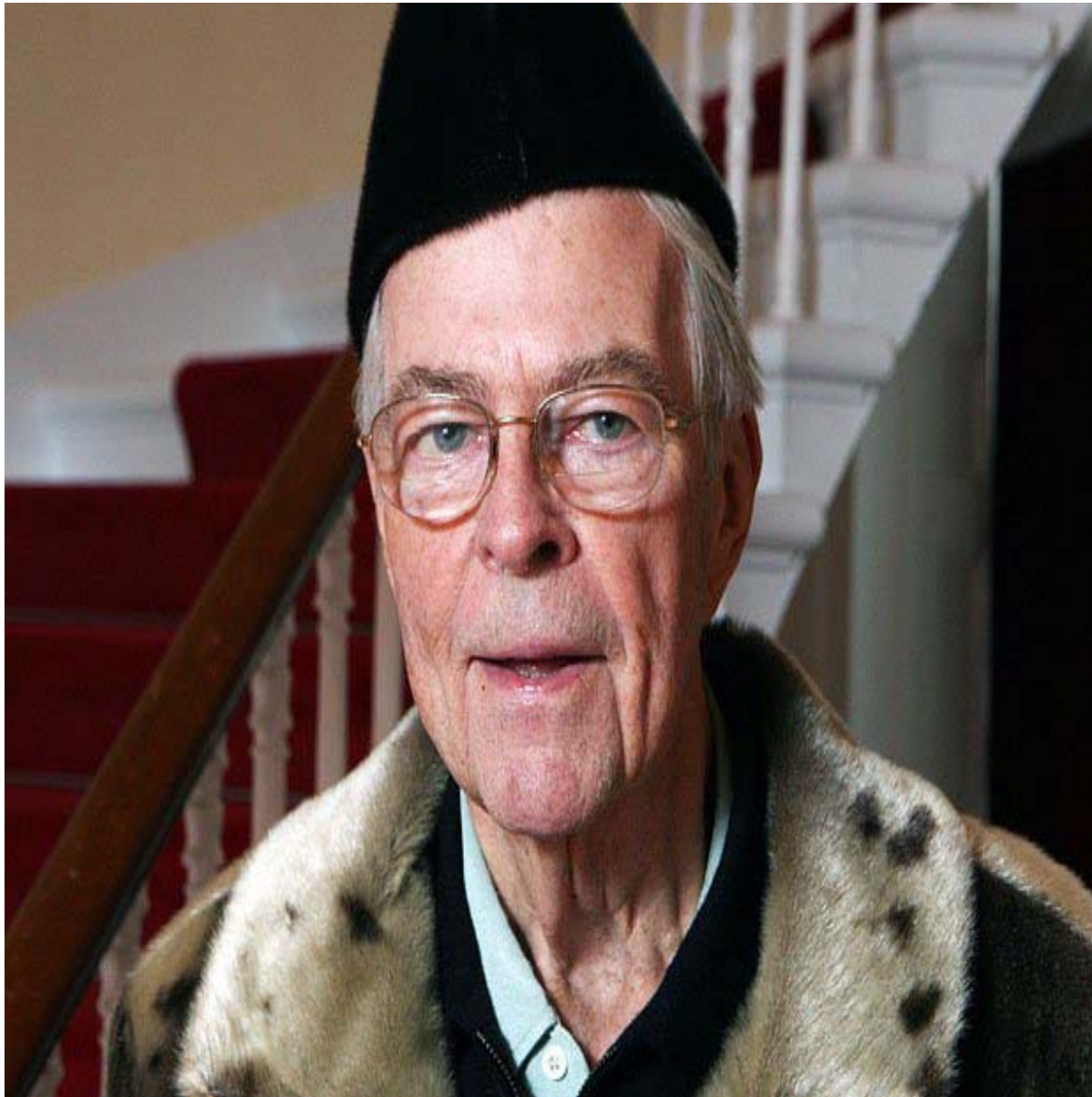
What is a stereotype?

- Begins with attitudes and beliefs about a person, a category (older people) or an event
- Stereotypes are “shortcuts” – oversimplifications about characteristics of groups of people.
- A convergence of attitudes influence rules, guidelines and policies that govern society

Roots of Ageism

- Social separation of young and old in modern society
- Negative information about older people e.g. apocalyptic demography
- Fear and vulnerability toward aging and death







Social Construction of Aging

- Aging is experienced beyond the physical and biological realm.
- Intergenerational interactions are influenced by ageist stereotypes and expectations including use of language.
- Ageism as a set of social relations that discriminate against older people.

From the literature...

- Robert N. Butler, then Director of the National Institute on Aging in the US, introduced the term 'ageism' in 1969. He defined it as a combination of three connected elements...

- prejudicial attitudes
 - towards older persons, old age and the ageing process
- discriminatory practices
 - against older people by individuals
- institutional policies
 - that are based on and perpetuate stereotypes about older people

Ageism may be:

- Personal or Institutional
- Intentional or Unintentional
- 'Self' or 'Other' directed

Ageism can negatively impact:

- health care providers' training and service delivery
- clients' behaviour and health outcomes
- how people view themselves and others who are aging

Personal Ageism

- Ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and practices on the part of individuals that are biased against persons or groups based on their older age.
 - Intentional e.g. some forms of elder abuse
 - Unintentional e.g. patronizing speech styles

Intentional Ageism

- **Abuse:** “any act or failure to act, within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, that jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older person.”
 - emotional, financial, physical, sexual
- **Neglect:** “is any inaction, either intended or unintended, within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, that causes harm to an older person.”

Unintentional Ageism - Elderspeak

- Simplified speech
- Exaggerated pitch (sing-song voice)
- Slow speaking rate
- Simplified syntax
- Demeaning emotional tone (“baby talk”)
- Collective pronouns
- Overly intimate endearments

Communication Predicament of Ageing Model – the negative spiral

- Negative stereotypes
- Inappropriate accommodations
- Ability of older adult to respond appropriately is constrained
- Resulting in reinforcement of negative stereotypes



Today you are going to learn
a new language



Impact of Elderspeak:

- "I often didn't feel strong enough to answer back. But even worse, I felt that this sort of attitude and message was grinding me down. It reduces your self-esteem and at times I felt it was just easiest to give in to the stereotype that I didn't know what I wanted or needed."
 - 78 year old retired school teacher

Elderspeak and Resistance to Care (RTC)





You have to appreciate cultural
diversity in aging!!



Institutional Ageism

- Policy, rules, or practices that discriminate against individuals and or groups because of their older age
 - intentional – e.g. rationalization of health care resources based on age
 - unintentional – e.g. policies or practices based on beliefs that older persons do not have sexual desires

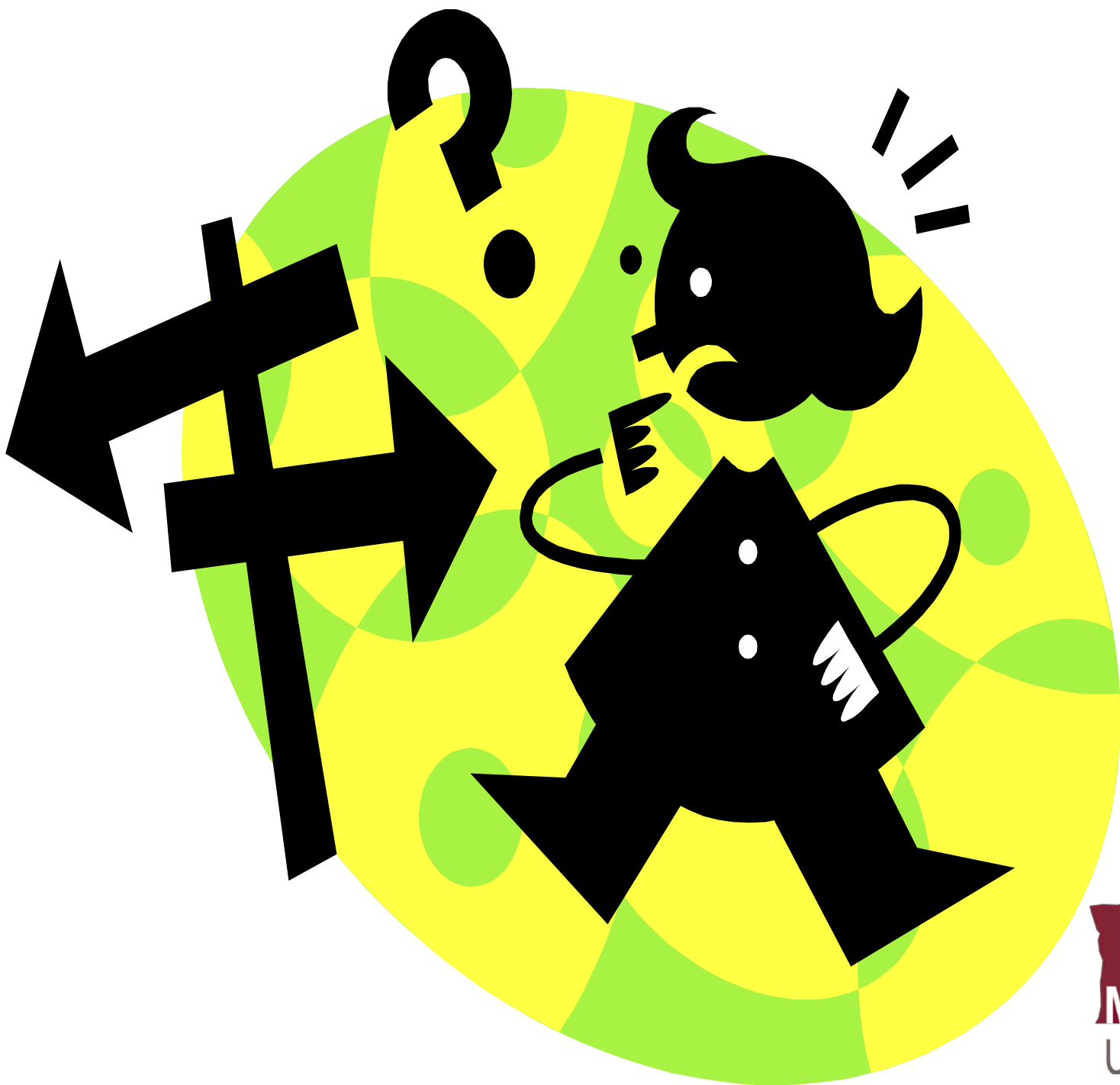


You have to talk about sex!!



Stereotypical beliefs that older people are non-sexual result in:

- Segregation of LTC residents by gender even in case of long term relationships
- Loss of intimacy
- Embarrassment re normal sexual urges
- Inadequate sexual health care



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You have to talk about sexual
diversity!!



A note about intersectionality...

...the study of intersections between different disenfranchised groups and more specifically, the study of the interactions of multiple systems of oppression or discrimination resulting in social inequality

- age, gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation

Sexual Diversity

- Up to 12.4% of people 60 and older identify as LGBTQ
- Only 1 in 4 LGBTQ people disclose their sexual orientation to health care providers.
- Stigma, discrimination, prejudice
- Lack of access to informal care

Impact of ageism?

Impact of Ageism

- Sense of helplessness ...
 - Decreases responsiveness, motivation and self esteem
 - Increases illness, mortality rates and memory problems
- (Parnham, 1987)

A note about loneliness:



On the other hand...

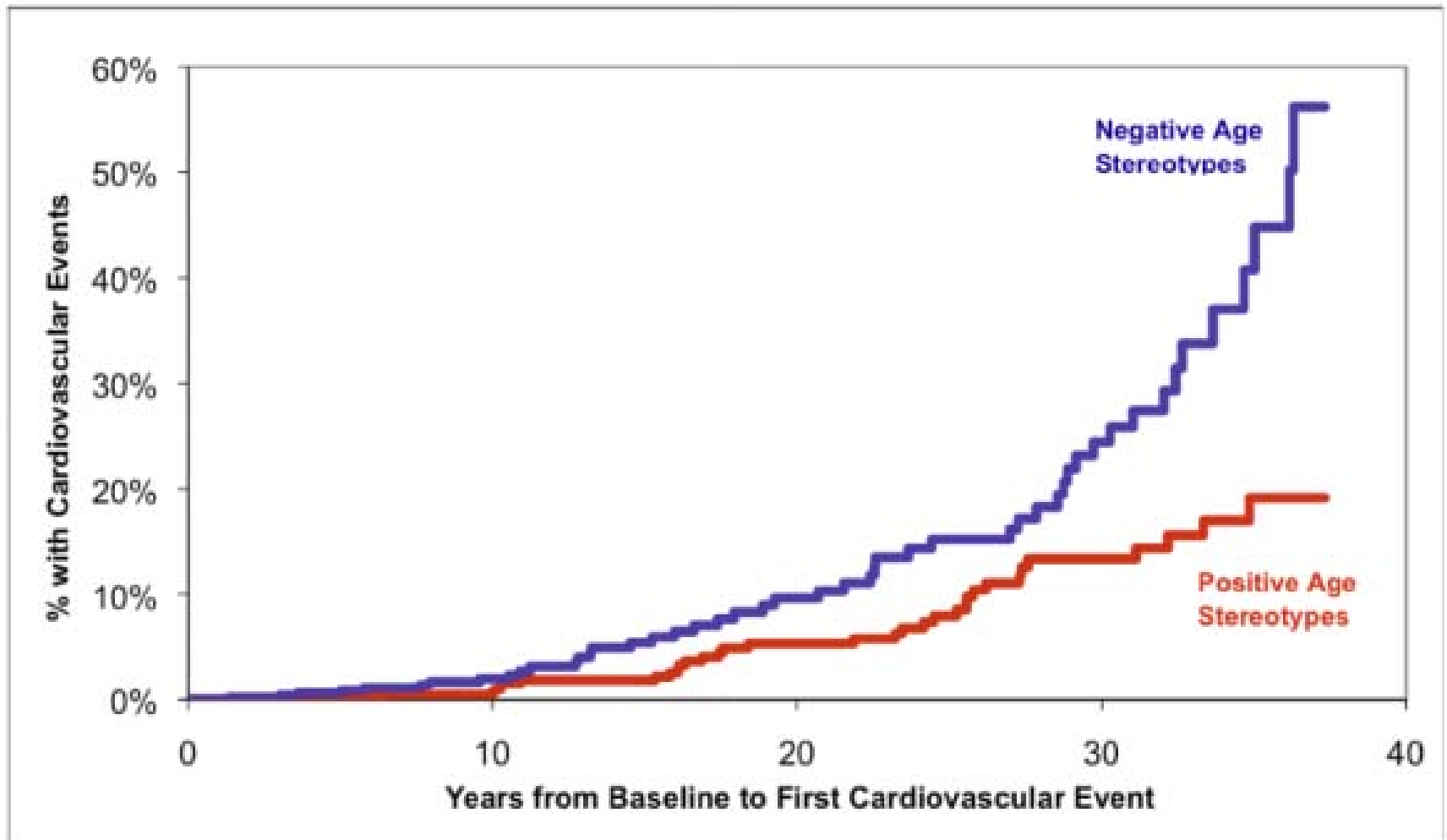
- Increased perceived control...
 - Improved memory, alertness, activity and physical health, decreased morbidity and mortality (Rodin, 1986)
 - Correlates of self-esteem unique to older adults are health status and attitudes toward aging (George, 1987)

Yale University Study:

“older individuals with more positive self-perceptions lived 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging...”

- Levy, B., Slade M., Kunkel, S. and Kasl, S. (2002). *Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(2), 261-270.





Association of negative (blue) versus positive (red) age stereotypes held in younger adulthood to risk of cardiovascular events (e.g., congestive heart failures, heart attacks, and strokes) over the next 38 years. Adapted from Levy, Zonderman, Slade, and Ferrucci (2009), p. 297.

Empowerment

“...it's not the size of the decision, but the ability to make it that is empowering”

- McInnes-Dittrich, K. (2009). *Social work with older adults: A biopsychosocial approach to assessment and intervention* (3rd Edition). Boston: Pearson, Allyn and Bacon.

Ageism and 'protection':

- Risk tolerance
- Self determination
- Autonomy
- Protection from harm
- Competency and Capacity

NL's Adult Protection Act:

Decisional-capacity is decision specific:

- “where an adult is determined to lack capacity for decision-making referred to in subsection (2) in one particular context, he or she shall not be presumed to lack the capacity for decision-making in those other contexts or all of them unless the contrary is proven.”

Ageism's Power...

- Comes from our willingness to take for granted what it means to be 65 or any other age
- Unreflective use of chronology (age) as marker of individual experience

Responding to ageism: A critical approach

Theories about aging:

- Early 1900s – aging as a biomedical concern
- 1930s – population aging as a social and political concern
- 1950s – successful aging, avoidance of disease
- 1980s – emergence of critical gerontology



A critical approach:

- Considers who is harmed and who benefits by prevailing normative standards
- Understands intersection of age with gender, class, race, sexuality along with access to income, nutritional food, housing, and health care – the ‘social construction’ of aging

Summary

- Face of aging is not homogenous
- Age is not synonymous with anything
- Ageist stereotypes result in ineffective and potentially damaging attitudes, policies and practices
- Ageism can be 'self' or 'other' directed

How do we get past Ageism? - CNPEA

- Identify myths and mis-information
- Challenge stereotypes and labels
- Learn more about aging
- Learn more about ageism and discrimination
- Listen to seniors who have experienced ageism
- Monitor and respond to ageist material in the media
- Speak up!



Cont'd

- Watch our own language
- Talk openly about aging issues – and diversity in aging
- Build intergenerational bridges to promote understanding
- Provide support for organizations that address ageism – be part of the solution!
- Push for change from your elected representatives

Simone de Beauvoir...

“If we do not know what we are going to be, we cannot know what we are. Let us recognize ourselves in this old man, or in that old woman. It must be done if we are to take upon ourselves the entirety of our human state.”



Thank You

