

# THIS CHAIR ROCKS

pushing back against ageism—which affects everyone

*Who me, ageist? Download my new consciousness-raising guide.*

**“Who me, ageist?”**

**How to start a  
consciousness-raising  
group**

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Blacks at the back of the bus. Women in the kitchen. Gays in the closet. For most of American history, until movements came along that changed things, that was “just the way things are.”

That’s still the way it is when it comes to getting older in America. Aging is seen as failure. Discrimination is pervasive. Stereotypes—Old people are incompetent. Wrinkles are ugly. It’s sad to be old—go unchallenged. When we assimilate those beliefs over a lifetime, often unconsciously, we feel shame and embarrassment instead of taking pride in the accomplishment of aging. That’s internalized ageism.

Confronting ageism means replacing those ageist stereotypes and stories with more nuanced and accurate ones. That won’t happen without a mass shift of

consciousness. That shift, like all social movements, begins within each of us. Change yourself, change the world, as the saying goes. Or as Gandhi put it, “Be the change you wish to see in the world. I’m no Gandhi, and I catch myself being ageist all time—like just last week, when I wondered why I hadn’t invited more our-age friends to a party co-hosted by a younger friend. We can’t challenge bias unless we’re aware of it, and everyone’s biased some of the time.

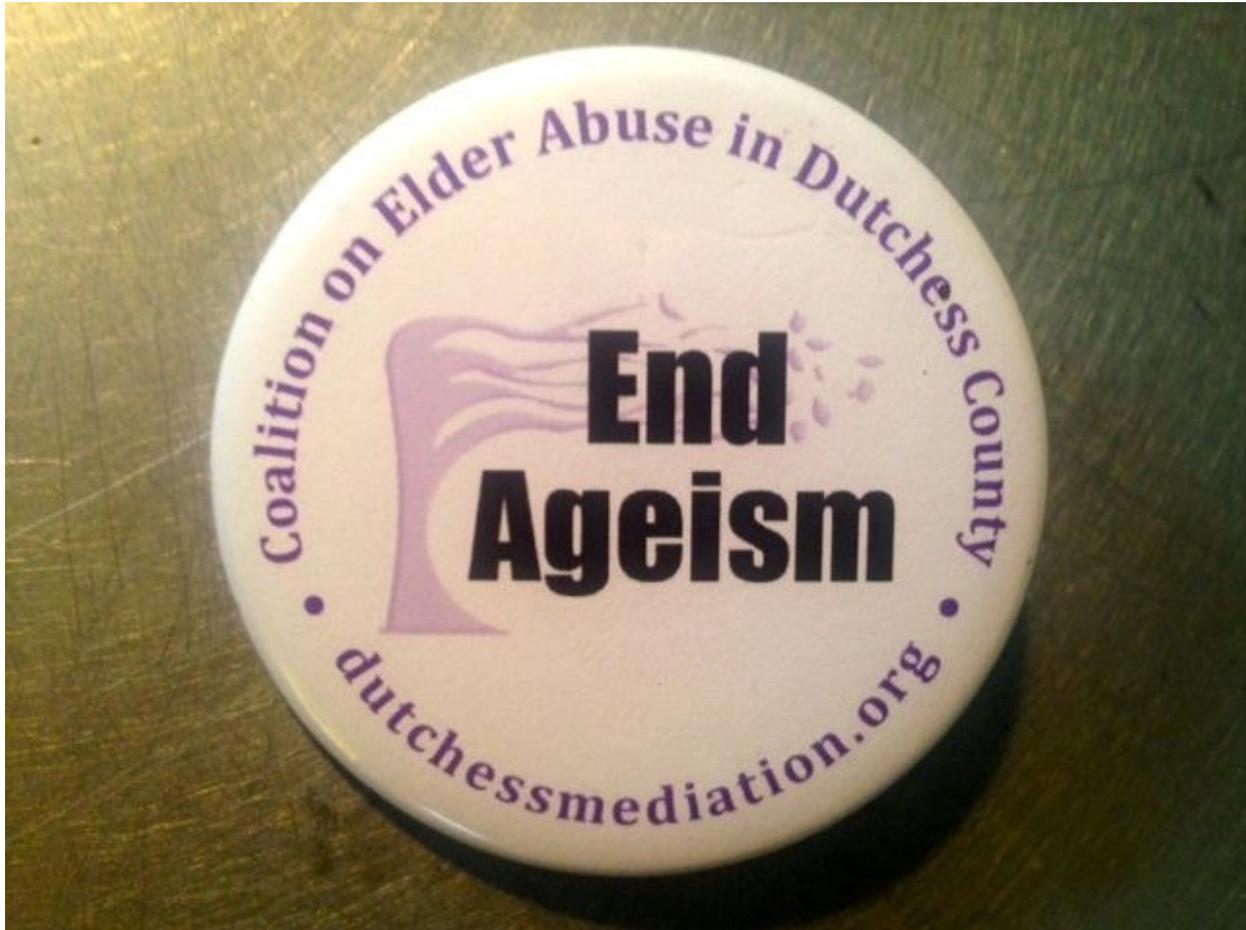
That’s where consciousness-raising comes in, and why I’ve written a booklet called [“Who Me, Ageist?” How To Start Your Own Consciousness-Raising Group.](#) Consciousness-raising uses the power of personal experiences to unpack unconscious prejudices and to call for social change. Participants tell and compare their stories. In the process, we learn that “personal problems”—like not landing a job interview, or being patronized, or feeling invisible—are actually widely shared political problems. By sharing truths, vulnerabilities, and experiences, we learn that being sidelined and feeling

inadequate aren't a result of personal failings. They're a result of being discriminated against.

Wherever you are and whatever you're doing—whether you want to change the world or simply to accept and even embrace your own aging—this first step is yours to take, and this booklet is your tool. I hope you'll download it, share it, change it, improve it, and add to it. I'll keep updating the “Anti-Ageism Resources” page, and welcome suggestions for new entries, ground rules, and discussion-starters. It's a collective work-in-progress.



Another way to be the change you want to see? “Make sure you’re not part of the problem.” That’s the way the facilitators put it at a program of the Mediation Center of Dutchess County for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2015 on June 12, where I gave the keynote. The Elks Lodge in Poughkeepsie was packed with 200 adult caseworkers and concerned community members, and facilitators helped each table identify the role of ageism in a set of real-life elder-abuse case histories. Great stuff, and you can see me wearing their great button.



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