

THE PERMEATION OF AGEISM: THE SANTA FE INCIDENT

Last week's prom. Final exams. Summer jobs.

These are what high schoolers should be talking about.

Instead, the deafening BOOM of a gunshot echoing around the hallways. Suddenly, a school hallway turns into a war zone.

Those kids in Santa Fe came into school wanting nothing more than the opportunity to learn, to prepare for college, and to see their friends and teachers. Instead, they got fear and senseless violence.

This incident represents the growing problem of ageism—discrimination based on age. It is reflected in the common belief that children, who are not yet adults, are naïve and defenseless. As a result, they are targeted for their perceived weaknesses and inability to portray their influence in society.

From ageism, no one is spared. Age is something we have in common, and events such as these should not be regarded as anomalies, but rather a reflection of the situation's gravity. The stereotypes ageism perpetuates will only continue to lead to prejudiced actions over time.

Ageism has been tirelessly addressed by Gray Panthers (<http://www.graypanthersnyc.org>), an organization led by Jack Kupferman that has worked to fight it in all its forms for decades. Gray Panthers understands that situations like this are not isolated incidents, but rather serious problems that are increasing at an alarming rate over time.

Remember the Parkland massacre? It happened only months ago, and it resulted in more innocent lives lost. Gray Panthers displayed their horror at this event, for it stands as yet another devastating example of ageism in our society.

The sad part? These are only two on a rapidly growing list.

Ever try Googling "school shootings?" I wouldn't recommend it. The list is so extensive that I was asked to choose a category: country, school level, or year. Even after choosing, I scrolled for an eternity. Each one had numbers, and each number meant more lives lost.

Actually, scratch that. Please do Google it. Please do continue to scroll as I did. If that's the only way to recognize this problem, please do. Because yes—this is a PROBLEM.

In fact, it's such a problem that these shootings have become NORMAL.

Normal is going to the grocery store, making a phone call, eating dinner.

Normal stops once ageist thoughts move into peoples' minds. Normal stops when a gun leaves the store.

Normal stops when lives are taken.

Unless we stop to consider this, such horrific, discriminatory actions based on a disregard for human rights will only continue to occur. That long list of shootings, all those numbers of children dead, will only continue to increase.

Being nineteen, I can already recount several terrifying instances in my life when ageism reared its ugly head. I have seen it first hand—how people use violent machines to perpetuate their ageist thoughts and ideas.

The first of these was in my junior year of high school, when bombs threats caused the school to bring in policeman who searched everyone entering the building. Suddenly, school became scarier, and we were all on edge from more than tests and homework.

And only last spring, my college went into lockdown when it was believed that we had an active shooter on campus. I remember sitting for hours in the dark as an unsettling silence permeated the dorm. I remember frantic calls and texts from my parents, who were desperately hoping I continued to respond.

Maybe both were only scares, but they could not have been. They showed me just how real and scary this problem is. They showed me the imminent need to address this before it's too late.

In my own fight against ageism, I will be interning with Gray Panthers this summer, for they represent one of the first steps to solving this problem. In fact, their empowering presence at the March for Our Lives on March 24, 2018 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsVkFdbAJgc&t>) demonstrated the need for people of all generations to come together to overcome this issue and fight these atrocities. Because ageism, as Gray Panthers knows, affects us all.

We have a hell of a long way to go, but we NEED to start fighting this.

And we need to start NOW.