



# Intersections: Gender, Race, and Ageism

Lessons for Cultivating a Vision of Equity



# “Intersections: Gender, Race, and Ageism”

## AGENDA

- My Learning & Lessons
- Questions They Raise
- Incentives to Act



# Lesson #1

## Aging and Ageism

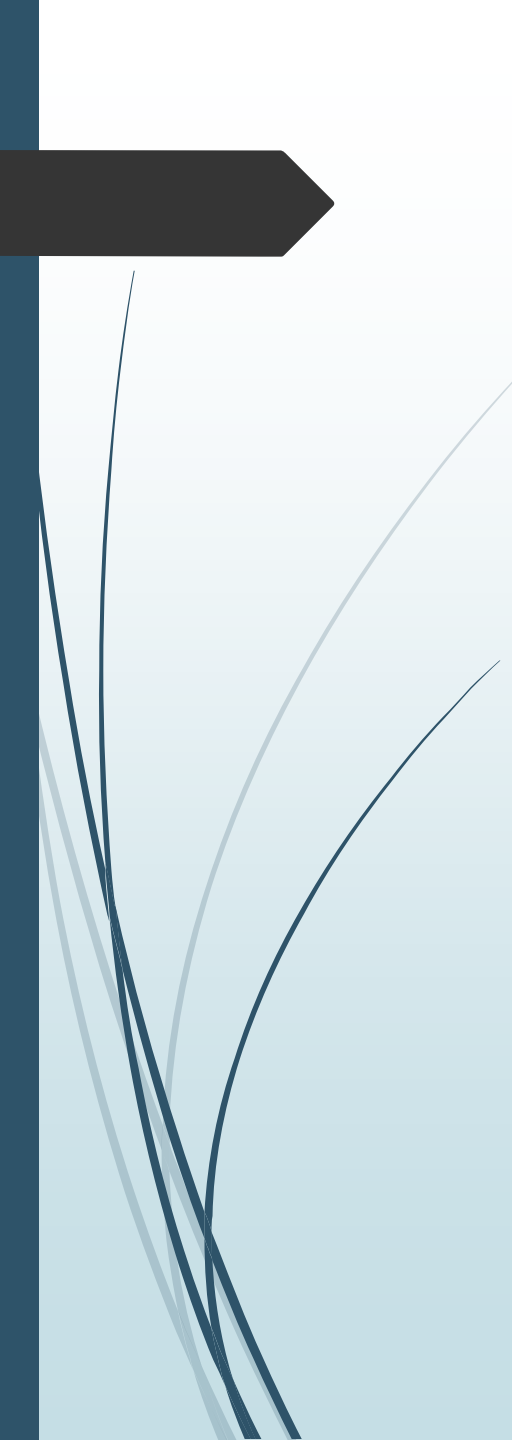
*We all age. With every breath. In fact, our age identity changes during our lifetime.*

- ▶ Child / Youth
- ▶ Adult
- ▶ Old Person

*What “sticky little messages” are attached to each of these age categories?*

# “Life Cycle”





*How does Ageism intersect and interact with other systems of identity and power to shape the contours of each of our lives?*



“Older Maine women are at an economic disadvantage compared to men.”


Median income for Mainers age 65+ who live alone

- ▶ Women \$22,059
- ▶ Men \$27,008



*Gendered* disparities produce fewer opportunities for women to amass wealth through savings or other investment vehicles.

- ▶ Life-long wage gaps and differential access to training opportunities
- ▶ Messages about “men’s work” vs. “women’s work”
- ▶ Tendency for women to shoulder more family [and household] responsibilities than men, and leaving the workforce to do so
- ▶ Women in numbers outweighing men in jobs that often lack benefits such as health insurance and employer-sponsored retirement plans.



“It is likely that half of older Maine women who live alone would have difficulty covering their basic needs for food, housing, transportation, healthcare, and other miscellaneous expenditures, especially if they were in less than excellent health or did not own their own home.”

*The Economic Security of Older Women in Maine:  
Data Report, January 2022*





## Lesson #2

*Ageism is similar to while also different from Racism and Sexism.*

*All are systems of identity and power operating to make distinctions, rank differences, and thus reserve resources and decision-making for a dominant group, keeping other identity groups from equal access to those resources. This is the work of power.*

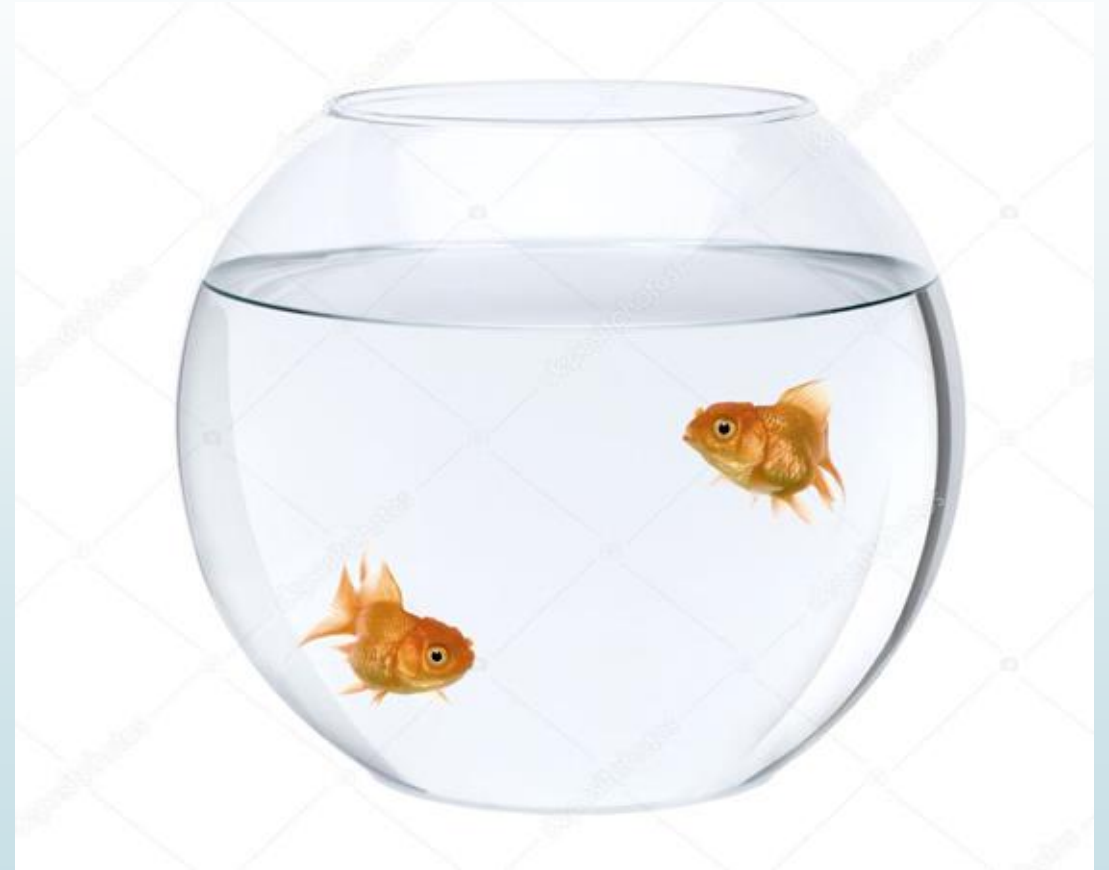
# Cultural Messaging

*"It's in the water." . . . .*

*"What's water?"*

Invisible, taken for granted,  
naturalized.

Internalized and  
Other-directed



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# Interpersonal Behavior

- “Grumpy Old Man” – is he “just complaining” and does he have the mental capacity to make decisions for himself?
- “Old *Woman* Driver” – should she really be behind the wheel of a car (and perhaps mourn the loss of mobility)?
- What example can you recall?

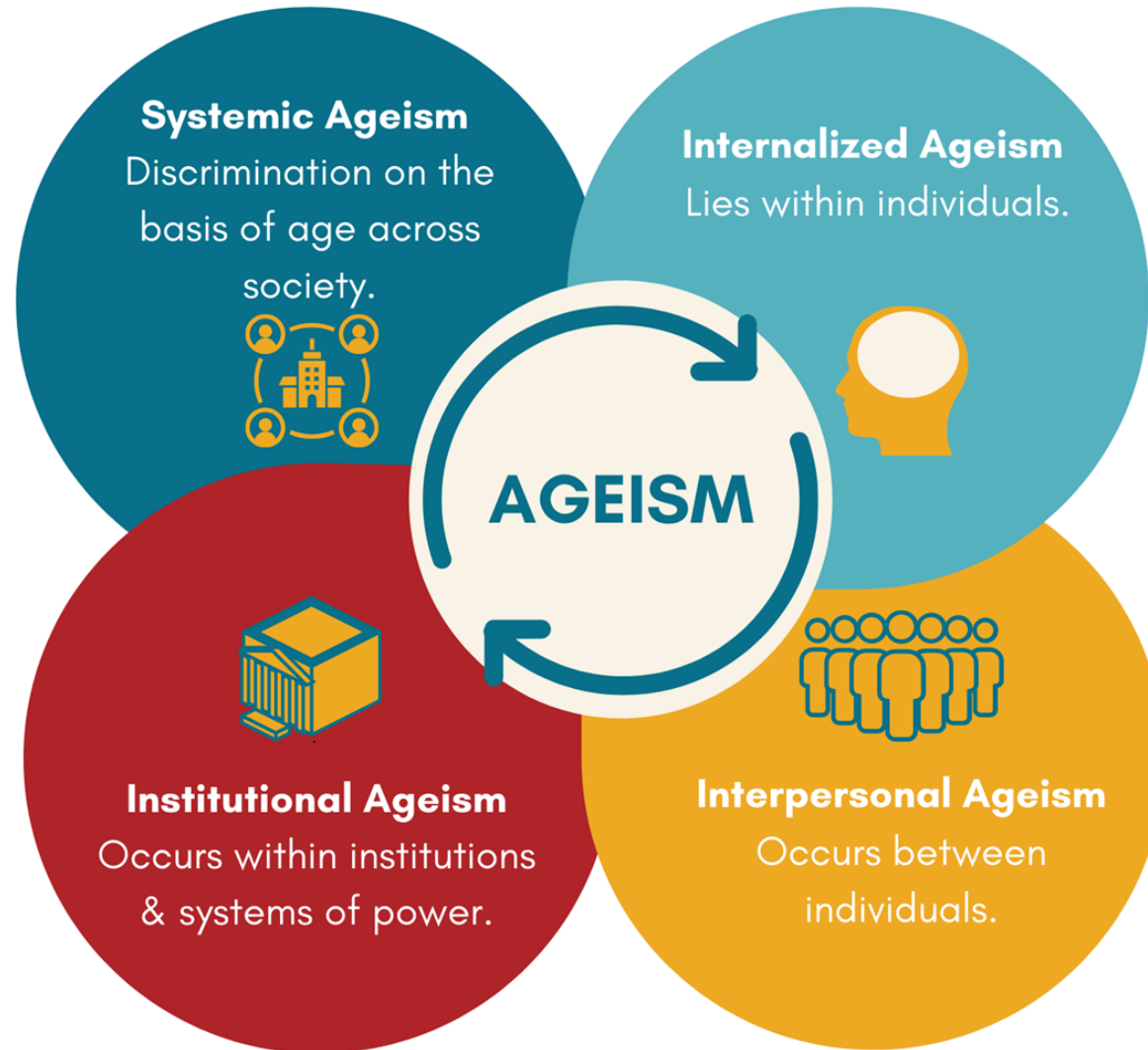


# Institutional Practices and Policy

## “Business as Usual”

- ▶ The National Institutes of Health adopted its Inclusion Across the Lifespan policy, requiring NIH-funded researchers to include children and older adults as research participants in clinical trials only in 2018.
- ▶ . . . Inclusion of Women and “Minorities” in 2017.

# The Arc of the Learning Exchange




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*Ageism is also different from Racism and Sexism.*

Ageism's cultural messaging appears to penetrate more deeply into our personal lives and interpersonal interactions.

As Ramsey Alwin, National Council on Aging, put it  
“we have trouble self-identifying as aging.”



Ageism does not elicit the moral condemnation (and nascent criminalization) that liberal democracy levies on racist and sexist practice.



# Intersections

When ageism intersects with other systems of identity and power, the effects are compounded.

Care work is perhaps the quintessential example of the intersection and interaction of multiple systems of identity-power.

- ▶ Who does care work?
- ▶ How is it valued (paid)?
- ▶ What are the lifetime effects on workers' access to resources needed for health, safety, and dignity?





*Intersections of identity-power appear to reinforce each other at the systemic level.*

Beliefs and practices that exclude one group's members on account of race, may legitimize efforts to marginalize another identity group on other grounds.

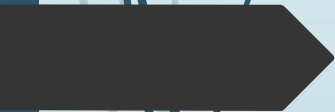
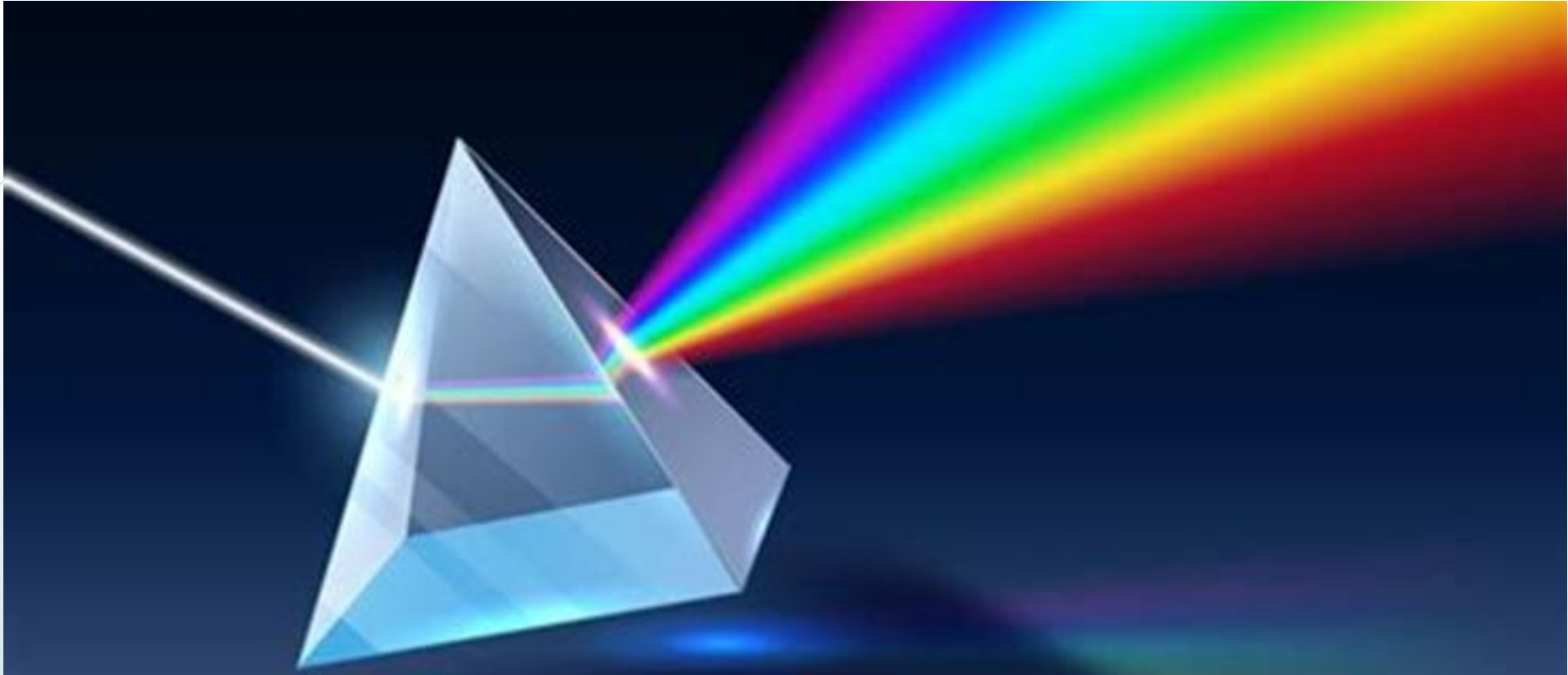
- ▶ Contemporary voter restrictions seem to be cascading in ways that are limiting ballot access for disabled voters, communities of color, people with limited financial resources, and seniors.
- ▶ Who's next?

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## Lesson #3

*We have work to do!*

This is big. The systems intersect. We need broader lenses, new narratives, and political imagination.





## For Starters . . .

Build a counter-narrative to Ageism's deficit messaging

Envision inclusive Elderhood with a variety of colors, voices, and perspectives

Use political imagination to collaborate with allies who can see themselves in a vision of redesigned supports and meaningful, dignified aging.