Final Report

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Abstract

Many people have been conditioned by their social relationships, and by general public discourse, to view aging as an entirely negative experience. People are taught that aging is undesirable and that one should try to lessen the impact on their own lives as much as possible, both physically and mentally. These views have given rise to ageism. According to the World Health Organization, “ageism is the stereotyping and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age; ageism can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.” Ageism affects society just as much as other forms of discrimination such as sexism and racism, but ageism has one unique feature that many other forms of discrimination do not share—ageism will most likely affect everyone at some point. In an unending cycle of spreading prejudicial attitudes towards aging, parents teach their children their own values including that getting older is undesirable. Parental views imprint not only ageist attitudes but ultimately lead the child to view themselves negatively as they get older (Levy “Age-Stereotype Paradox” S118).

In response to this pervasive problem, I have created an age-positive, online community called Age Into Action to challenge the false notions of ageing that have permeated our society for centuries. Through engagement with others across the USA and the world, people who are experiencing ageism, those who have experienced it in the past, or those who feel they might be internalizing ageism, are able to see that ageing does not have to be a negative experience. Activities designed to help individuals break free from aging stereotypes are proposed to online
community members. The majority of activities are sustainability-based, meaning they encourage individuals to help not only the environment but also help the individual’s view of themselves and their communities.

**INTRODUCTION**

American society has a problem with ageing which can be seen in multiple avenues, including negative media portrayals of aging (Ellis and Morrison 57-73) and the constant bombardment of age-defying products for men and women. The ageist mindset continues to pervade as negative stereotypes are perpetuated throughout society. Hiring practices that favor younger employees and individual subconscious thoughts, such as when we blame something wrong person does on their age, are examples of how ageist actions and attitudes have woven themselves into our daily lives. These social maladies are the result of hundreds of years of negative ideas and stereotypes about ageing that have been passed down from generation to generation. Stereotypes about older people include but are not limited to: being averse to technology, unwilling to learn new skills, difficult to manage, sad and depressed, uninterested in the outside world, and that mental and physical deterioration are inevitable in old age (Thornton 303).

The make-up and pharmaceutical industry has also marketed aging as negative idea as aisles full of anti-aging and anti-wrinkle products marketed towards women can be found in stores. Men are told by commercials and advertisements that a loss of virility and sexual performance is because they are getting old---most likely we will never see a Viagra commercial with a young man in it. But is that loss of sexual drive age related? Sexual dysfunction is a
serious medical and social symptom that occurs in many men. According to research, impotence occurs in 50% of men with diabetes mellitus. Atherosclerosis, which is fat deposits in arteries, is the cause of approximately 40% of erectile dysfunction in men older than 50 years. Overall, among the most commonly recognized conditions associated with sexual dysfunction are high blood pressure, lipid problems (cholesterol, triglycerides), diabetes, and cigarette smoking. It seems lifestyle choices and health problems, rather than age, bring on the sexual dysfunction in many cases. Because of the stereotypes of aging, including those related to sexual performance, society continues to see aging in a negative light because of external messages they are exposed to that attribute problems to the aging process. In a study done of people aged 50 or older who were followed over a decade, “participants with more positive self-perceptions of aging ... had better functional health over the course of the study and lived an average of 7.5 years longer than those with more negative self-perceptions of aging” (Levy “Stereotype Embodiment” 332).

We are all individuals, and just like children to not all mature at the same rate, people do not all age at the same rate. Like many acts of discrimination against a group of people, ageing stereotypes do not consider individual characteristics (Ory et al. 165). Put two people of the same age side by side and you may see two different beings. Two people aged 20 years old will not look or act the same. They may have differences in career aspirations, body type, personalities, etc. So why then should society think all older people are the same as well? Diana Nyad swam from Cuba to Florida at age 62! I don’t know too many people who could do that at all, regardless of their age.
The previously mentioned stereotypes of getting older have caused problems for people who still have hopes and desires for the type of life they want to lead as they age. A 55-year-old man who has not internalized his age, meaning he doesn’t behave or look the way society expects a 55-year-old man to look and behave, may have ambitions and goals which do not fit societal views of what he can and cannot do. This means that, for example, if he wants to go out and start a new career, he will most likely be seen as near the end of his usefulness because he will soon be forced to retire, or he will have trouble finding a job because of negative, older worker stereotypes. While this project focuses on the older side of the ageing spectrum, ageism can also affect younger people to a lesser degree (Raynor 58). Younger individuals are welcomed to share their experiences of ageism as well with the online community. Not letting everyone, regardless of age, participate in the discussion would be considered ageism and not conducive to the project’s goals.

**Goals and Methods**

This project is being split into two phases:

**Phase 1**, which is covered in this report, is the creation of the website and community, the methods used, and feedback from prospective users.

**Phase 2**, which will be “opening” the website to prospective members and marketing the community, will be completed in the summer of 2018.

The goal of the project is straightforward--to dispel the negative stereotypes that revolve around aging while incorporating sustainability-minded lifestyle changes into community members’ lives. The project highlights, through their own actions, individuals who
refuse to be bound by the negative aging stereotypes that are prevalent in our society, and
those inspired to change by seeing others make positive changes in their lives. Through
structured and unstructured activities and challenges, online community members actively
engage in activities and behaviors that fight internal and external forces of ageism. Structured
activities include those that must be done on a specific day, such as “Meatless Mondays,”
where participants are encouraged to give up meat one day a week. Unstructured challenges
include those behaviors or actions that do not have to be done at a particular time. An example
of an unstructured activity is not buying bottled water, instead choosing to use an
environmentally-friendly, refillable water bottle only.

Another goal of this project includes making positive changes in others, including the
younger population and employers, who witness the activity of the online community
members. These activities will challenge the stereotypes of what ageing in America has come to
mean and will affect positive change in the way we see and treat our older population. As the
younger generation sees the actions of -- and possibly interacts online with -- the older
individuals in this project, their perceptions of aging may change. This will lead not only to less
ageist behaviors but will also positively impact their own personal perceptions of themselves as
they age (Levy “Age-Stereotype Paradox” S118).

Online community challenges/activities posed to community members are crucial to
reducing the stigma that accompanies aging. These challenges are designed to defy stereotypes
such as “older people are afraid of change” and “older people are not interested in their
communities,” among many others (Thornton 303). Community members can choose to start
slowly by picking one activity to participate in, such as the weekly Meatless Monday challenge, or they can choose to participate in multiple activities side by side.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter count a large percentage of older people (40+) as consistent users of their services. By sharing photos and personal achievements, engaging in meaningful conversations, trying new things, and having access to a supportive community, online community members who are older, and the younger individuals who see what the older members are accomplishing, will experience first-hand how aging can be a positive, empowering experience. As an added benefit of using social media to communicate, research shows “using the Internet for communication may help reduce social isolation, loneliness, and depression, as well as enhance social support among older adults” (White et al 378). Other research shows that the actual impact of Internet use reduces the probability of depression for certain older adults by 20-28% (Cotten et al 496). By positioning activities by other older people as something normally done along the course of a normal lifestyle, others may want to join in on the activities. Research published in 2017 by the Stanford Department of Psychology states that people’s behavior is influenced by what they perceive as social norms (Sparkman and Walton 1663). Depression can also be lessened in later life through engagement in meaningful activities and group support (Fiske et al 363), both of which will be found in the online community.

For lengthier conversations or for those people who may not be willing to use social media, an extensive forum on the website will accommodate conversations users wish to have with other community members. Age and sustainability-related topics and conversation
prompts will be posted daily. Information regarding marketing/posting on social media falls out of the scope of this report (content will be developed during Phase 2), but sustainability-focused infographics will be posted, direct conversations will be held with community members, photo challenges will take place on Instagram, etc.

Many topics on the blog will also be a place where people can learn about age-related topics and sustainability topics in general. These blog topics will sometimes relate to associated community challenges/activities. For example, when a person chooses to participate in the weekly food waste challenge, they need to understand what excess food waste does to the environment and how throwing away food impacts their finances. Planned blog posts include:

- **Ageism 101**: This will be an educational article that new members will be encouraged to read when they decide to participate in the community.
- **Food Waste**: What is the impact of throwing away food you don’t eat?
- **Eating Locally**: Why should you strive to eat local foods?
- **Recycling and Upcycling**:
- **Going Meatless**: What’s the impact of meat production on the environment?
- **What is Greenwashing?** (being a smart consumer)
- **Gardening 101**
- **Farmers Markets**
- **Volunteering in Your Community**
- **Ageism in the Workplace**
- **Age and Sexuality**
• **Eco-footprint Challenge**: (modeled after activities in Sustainability 140 at The University of New Mexico)

• **What is Healthy Living?** (will focus on health in general and healthism)

• **Solar Power at Home**

• **Farmers and Their Impact**

• **Big Pharma/Pharmaceutical Culture**

• **Physical Activity as We Age** (will focus more on individual abilities as opposed to a ‘one size fits all’ approach)

• **Organic Foods** (will focus on pros and cons)

• **Meditation** (reduces stress, etc.)

• **Guest writers from other blogs will be invited to write articles for the blog.**

**Branding and Website Development**

In my opinion, developing the Age into Action brand is the hardest aspect of this project, just as it is for many organizations. When creating the logo, I went with a bright color scheme that included an image of the world being cradled by two leaves. See Figure 1.

The choice to go with bright colors was a personal choice because I wanted the community to have a sense of optimism and fun. Because the focus of the community is ageism and discrimination, darker colors would’ve taken the entire ‘tone’ of the brand in a different direction. The topic is so heavy that, in my opinion, the entire brand needed to present a happy “face” to the world. Since the negative aspects of ageism will be discussed in depth in the blog and the forum, the community members participating in activities/challenges will only be
exposed to the bright colors and empowering side of the brand at all other times since the activities will mostly take place on social media platforms.

The website itself was challenging to build since I have never created anything of this scope. Technical challenges aside, the website has been created with users in mind foremost. Since I am interweaving the topics of ageism and sustainability into one organization, there is a lot of information to cover and visitors to the website may need an overview of what Age into Action is all about and what its goals are. I created an introductory video, which itself was a challenge to make. Besides poring over hundreds of video clips, I also had to write the text that appears over each video clip.

**Introductory Website Video**

The video is located on the Home page and is brought up when visitors click the “Watch Our Short Overview Video” button. The button is placed *above the fold*, meaning it’s on the visible space that users will see when they first land on the website without having to do any scrolling down. The music is lively and upbeat—again, putting on a light tone on a dark subject so the mood is happier than it would be if the music was more serious in nature. The video breakdown by scene are shown in *Figures 2-19*. After seeing the video, the viewer should have a basic idea what Age into Action is, what we do, what the viewer can do, and what the next steps are to find out details. Because there is limited space on the screen and due to time restraints, sources for the information presented in the video are not shown within the video, but the information regarding the effects of ageism come from the references, specifically Thornton, listed at the end of this report.
Website Pages

I wanted to avoid information overload as it can easily happen with websites where someone is trying to say everything about a topic. My strategy was to save most of the detailed information for the FAQs. Every other page just gives a general overview of the problem of ageism and how Age into Action combats it. Besides the link to the video, the Home page also has a feed from our social media accounts on it so potential members can see activity going on.

The main quote between the images on the Home page (See Figure 18) says, “Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength.” That’s a quote from Betty Friedan, an iconic figure in the women’s movement in the 1960s and 70s. The images shown on the left side of the page show what Age into Action’s activities/community challenges will focus on. From the top left going clockwise:

- Community (image of hands holding wrists)
- The environment (people enjoying nature image)
- Food (image of fresh food)
- Physical Activity (bicycle rider image)

Other website pages:

- **Our Approach:** This page will talk about how we combat ageism and why we chose to do sustainability-minded challenges and activities to do it.
- **Ready? Start Here!:** This page gives next steps when a visitor decides they would like to participate in the community. This page is extremely important because without
guidance, potential members will not necessarily know what do to get involved in the community.

- **About/FAQs (See Figure 20):** This page gives an overview of our mission and goals. There is also an in-depth FAQ--Frequently Asked Questions--section (See Figure 19.) It’s here that I also discuss the involvement of the University of New Mexico along with the logo for the Sustainability Studies department.

- **Blog:** This page is home to the blog previously mentioned.

- **Forum (see Figure 21):** Topics will vary but will include a place for people to create accounts to participate with others in conversations that are age-specific, meaning, for example, the health topic below will be about health issue *as we age*. Forum topics and the kind of conversations that can be had include:
  
  o **Ageism in the Workplace:** connect with others who have experienced it for advice.
  
  o **Health:** Age-related health issues
  
  o **Finances:** retirement, social security, etc.
  
  o **Education:** going back to school in later life, online courses, etc.
  
  o **Career:** changing careers in later life, etc.
  
  o **Sustainability:** all types of sustainability-related topics
  
  o **Family:** how getting older changes relationships, death of a spouse or friends, etc.
  
  o **Other forum topics will be added as the project progresses!**
- **Community Member Spotlight Page (See Figure 22):** This page will include small interviews of community members who show exceptional attitudes and action regarding aging. It will highlight members who go back to school, those who are making a difference in their communities, those who are passionate about sustainability, etc.

**Survey and Analysis**

Because of instructor feedback, my questions were limited to 6 since there is no reward given for participating. A survey was sent out with only 39 people responding. Due to time constraints and since I am not skilled in writing surveys, the questions may not be as effective as I would’ve liked. But, I will be working on a more thorough survey which will be part of my marketing plan due to be written in the summer of 2018. That survey will be more in-depth, and more time will be available to carefully craft questions. This survey asked respondents to watch the intro video and peruse the website, [www.ageintoaction.com](http://www.ageintoaction.com). Below are the results of my initial survey:

**What is your first reaction to the idea behind Age into Action?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>48.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat positive</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat negative</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very negative</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How would you rate the quality of the website and introductory video?

Very high quality 61.54%

High quality 35.90%

Neither high nor low quality 2.56%

Low quality 0.00%

Very low quality 0.00%

How innovative is idea behind Age into Action?

Extremely innovative 25.64%

Very innovative 38.46%

Somewhat innovative 30.77%

Not so innovative 5.13%

Not at all innovative 0.00%
When you think about the AIA idea, do you think of it as something you need or don’t need in your life?

Definitely need 20.51%

Probably need 41.03%

Neutral 28.21%

Probably don’t need 10.26%

Definitely don’t need 0.00%

Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your age?

Yes 74.36%

No 25.64%

If the Age into Action community were active today, how likely would you be join in?

Extremely likely 7.69%

Very likely 17.95%

Somewhat likely 51.28%

Not so likely 12.82%

Not at all likely 10.26%
Analysis of Survey

Because time was short in between getting the website completed for the UNM class deadline and receiving the survey answers, the respondent list was very small—39 total. An analysis of the answers I received says that almost 50% of the people responded well to the idea behind Age into Action. This shows a nice feasibility of the project becoming something people will respond well to when it is open to the public in Fall 2018. About 62% of respondents found the website and video of very high quality and 36% found it of high quality. No changes are scheduled to be made to the site design or video presentation based on this feedback. About 38% found the idea behind this project very innovative and about 26% found it very innovative. This is important because I feel that an innovative solution to a long-standing problem is needed to make a difference---I think I am on the right track with my idea. A whopping 74% of respondents said they have felt discriminated against because of their age at some point in their lives—the problem of ageism is very clear and people realize it’s an issue.

Where the changes start to deviate from the very positive to hesitation/concern is when I asked people if this idea behind my project, the idea of fighting ageism with sustainability-related principles, is something they need in their lives. This is where more time to craft a better question would’ve been favorable. We are all busy and people have different focuses in their day-to-day lives. If the respondents were not into living sustainable lives already, they may find they do not want to completely change their lifestyle, not because they don’t want to but because they might not have much time to focus on it. The fact that 41% of respondents said
they “probably need” it says to me that they realize this is important but they need more of a reason as to why they should incorporate my idea into their lives, no matter how busy they are.

The last question asked if they would join the online community if it was active today. About 18% said yes and 51% said somewhat likely. About 13% said not so likely. Similar to the question that asked if my community was something they need in their lives, this says that people still need to be convinced as to why they should join my community.

Even though it was a small sampling of people, the survey information I gathered was very encouraging. The biggest thing is that people responded positively to the idea and website/video. Coming up with the answer to “why should I join the community?” will happen in the marketing phase of my project. Clearly, I will need to make a strong case for joining my community otherwise the movement I am trying to create will stall.

**Reflection**

Working on this project has been an amazing experience. Creating this website and community has allowed me to make use of everything I have learned over the past five years at UNM. While it can be very easy to take a class and forget much the information because it is not used, that has not been the case so far in my experience. The information I learned in almost every class dealing with sustainable topics will be used within my community. Perhaps one of the best things I can do regarding sustainability is to pass on what I have learned. An example of the impact I can make includes having my entire online community participating in volunteer programs in their own communities (i.e. “It’s volunteer weekend! Let’s go out and do
some good.”) The impact can be multiplied several times in communities across the United States, and possibly the world.

This project has also taught me much about what I don’t know. While knowledgeable about many topics, I am far from an expert on many of the topics I plan on talking about within my online community. This project will challenge me to continue learning about myself and sustainable ideas. For example, I have knowledge about farmers markets based on what I learned from the Farmers Market practicum class at UNM. When I go to write a blog post about Farmers markets, I will take what I know and will have to research to find out more.

On a more personal note, I learned a lot about myself during my time at UNM and in particular, this project. As suggested by Bruce Milne, I plan on making a series of blog posts describing my time at UNM. Those posts will hopefully show others that it is possible to make a difference not only in yourself, but those around you. I am embodying what Age into Actions stands for—taking action to improve not only your own life but taking action to improve the lives of others while helping our world become a healthier, more inclusive place to live.

**Acknowledgements**

This entire project would not have been possible were it not for the passionate and knowledgeable professors and lecturers in the Sustainability Studies program at the University of New Mexico. I owe my gratitude to Eileen Shaughnessy who gave me all the support and guidance I needed even though she is extremely busy and somehow always found time to guide my work in many classes. The bulk of my sustainability knowledge comes from Eileen’s courses and I owe her my deepest thanks. I thank Dr. Bruce Milne, whose feedback throughout my
project was an invaluable resource in directing my work. Dr. Milne also taught me to never forget to look at the positive side of sustainability---that type of positive thinking is the driving force behind my project. I would also like to thank Jessica Rowland. Her Growers’ Market practicum class showed me what an important role a sustainable food system has in our world. I would also like to thank my wife, Deborah, and my daughter, Emma, who put up with long days and nights of me being cooped up in my office working on this project.
Works Cited


FIGURES

Figure 1: Age Into Action logo

From the time we're born, life is a wonderful journey.

Figure 2: Introduction to the problem
But as we grow, we're exposed to negative stereotypes about getting older. **Aging becomes something to be dreaded, especially mid-to-late life.**

Figure 3: Introduction to the problem continued

**Sadly, our society revolves around these negative ideas.**

Figure 4: Educating the video viewer
These stereotypes have given rise to AGEISM, discrimination based on age.

Figure 5: Educating the video viewer continued

Ageism affects a person's self-esteem, social status, career, and more.

Figure 6: The effects of ageism
Figure 7: What the viewer needs to do to help solve the problem

Figure 8: What/Who is Age into Action and what is our goal?
Figure 9: What our activities do

Figure 10: Examples of activities
Figure 11: Examples of activities continued

Figure 12: Examples of activities continued
Figure 13: Examples of activities continued

Pick up a new exercise routine or tell others about yours.

*Inspire someone or be inspired!*

Discuss age-related topics on our forum.

Career, Education, Health, and more!
Figure 14: Discussion forum mentioned

Figure 15: Additional ways to communicate

Figure 16: Call to action
Figure 18: Home Page Image

Figure 19: Logo and the invitation to explore the website
Figure 20: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
Figure 21: Community Forum
Figure 22: Community Spotlight
### Figure 23-Logic Model

#### Situation

- **Description of Circumstances and Opportunities:**
  - Ageism affects everyone, especially those in the 40-65 age range. (AARP already serves older than 65)
  - These people can become isolated and depressed.
  - Discriminatory behavior is tolerated by society—preconceived notions given by society and even outright 'accented' discrimination such as old age greeting cards—change with race or gender and there would be problems.
  - Certain stereotypes exist about older people when forced to retire, people lose focus their drive to be productive.
  - There is no outlet to showcase older peoples' achievements/lifestyle to society at large to dispel myths of what 'being old' can mean (old people are not always sick—some are athletes or scholars, for example.)

- **Resources and Helpful Relationships with:**
  - Non-traditional student groups at Universities
  - Data showing how older people use certain online services such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.
  - Local, state, and federal government agencies showing what work is being done with people aged 45-65 such as job resources, education help, volunteer opportunities, etc.
  - Other bloggers/websites in the field of aging...could be guest bloggers

#### Inputs

- Research website creation tools for best building and user experiences
- Become very familiar with business use of social media platforms
- Brainstorm business name
- Research latest information on ageism
- Research similar 'movement' campaigns to see how they grew successfully using traditional and new media
- Research blog topics relevant to people aged 45-65

#### Activities

- Products and events intended to lead to project outcomes
  - Create an online resource for people to visit.
  - Include a blog with relevant information with a weekly post @ minimum
  - Social media accounts across several platforms that will be active daily with all users including myself
  - Include an online message board (and relevant subsections such as an Education message board, etc.) for ongoing support for everyone in the community.
  - Sustainability-related topics will be included.
  - Show varied achievement/lifestyle choices showing not all people age the same. This will vary depending on platform i.e., Instagram vs. blog post.

#### Outputs

- **Knowledge learned**
  - Why ageism exists in our society and not in some others
  - Strategies for combating ageism both personally and professionally
  - Learning how shared life experiences can bring people together; importance of community
  - Critical thinking and self-re-examination about aging
  - Learning to focus on the good in life
  - Younger friends/family in social circles will learn that aging is not always negative

- **Actions from knowledge learned**
  - Lifestyle choices will be different due to not 'acting' old
  - Will not let their age define their sense of worth
  - Will connect with other like-minded individuals
  - Will continue to learn new/truly things into old age (go back to school, etc.)
  - Will understand to that difficulties in later age are shared by many
  - Will learn to celebrate aging
  - Health and personal lives
  - Self-worth and lower depression
  - Staying active both physically and mentally

- **Conditions improved by actions**
  - Keeping the mind engaged positively
  - Will lessen negative thoughts
  - Isolation in old age will lessen
  - Positive attitude about aging

#### Assumptions

- Older people want to hang out with others like themselves. I will be able to attract people to the website using the topic of aging for marketing. Many people have experienced ageism in some form. People are scared of what old age will bring. Younger people see older people as nearing the end of their usefulness. Older people want to contribute to society or show usefulness in some form (not just retire and remain quiet.)

#### External factors

- Understanding of technology may be a barrier and reduce people’s participation in the community. Learning all the ins and outs of social media will affect participation by us and users. Effective time management will be required to stay engaged with community. Convincing others to form a community based around age may be challenging because they may not want to draw attention to themselves.